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Transition Planning for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities:

Espoused Versus Actual Transition Planning

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Transition Planning for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Espoused Versus Actual Transition Planning

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful supportive family. My late husband Charles, my late son Jeffrey, and my oldest son Dylan have given me vast encouragement and selfless sacrifice to see me through. I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, Fritz and Frances Rusch, and my grandparents, Robert and Erna Jonas, who, although they did not go to college, encouraged me and financially supported me so that I could realize my dream.

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Transition Planning for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Espoused Versus Actual Transition Planning

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 mandated transition planning services for students with disabilities who are exiting high school and entering the world of work or postsecondary education. Despite collaborative efforts between educational institutions and various service agencies to facilitate transition from high school to employment or continued education, students with disabilities appear to lag behind their non-handicapped peers in these areas.

This study focused on transition planning for students with mild disabilities enrolled in a community college in central Texas. The individual transition plans (ITPs) of fifteen students who had self-declared to the college as having a learning disability were obtained from the high school from which they graduated. The records were analyzed for evidence of twelve essential components of transition planning recommended in educational literature. The students were interviewed regarding their

transition plans and what they viewed as factors necessary for success in college. Four professional staff members of the Education Support Service, which serves students with disabilities on campus, were also interviewed regarding how prepared the students were for college work and what factors that promote college success should be included in adequate transition plans.

The study investigated the adequacy and "fit" of transition planning as an effective means of preparing students with disabilities for the reality of postsecondary education. Knowledge gained from this study could assist public school special educators to develop appropriate ITPs and inform practice in the field of secondary special education in areas such as curriculum, collaboration with service agencies, and assessment of transition service needs.

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Chapter I

Development of the Problem

Introduction

In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was amended to mandate transition planning and services for students with disabilities beginning no later than age sixteen. The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA lowered the age of consideration for transition planning to age fourteen. In the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA the mandatory age for transition planning was adjusted to begin no later than age sixteen, but the law allowed states the option to maintain the age of 14 as an age to begin transition planning (Shaw, 2009). In addition to this special education law, on May 4, 1994 President William Clinton signed into law the School-to-Work Opportunity Act of 1994 (STWOA), a law that emphasized providing American school children with the needed skills to enter the work force. The STWOA was closely linked to Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, legislation enacted by congress which outlined eight national education goals developed as a result of a 1989 education summit of the state governors and President George Bush (National Education Goals Panel, 1994). All students, including those with disabilities, are targeted by the STWOA and Goals 2000. These laws (IDEA, STWOA, and Goals 2000) provide an opportunity for educational personnel to examine the circumstances/readiness of students with disabilities to enter the work force or postsecondary education as they exit public schools.

Despite collaborative efforts between educational institutions and various service agencies to facilitate transition between school, work and/or postsecondary settings,

students with disabilities appear to lag behind their peers in terms of successful employment and completion of postsecondary education programs. In particular, there is limited knowledge of the capacities, adequacy, and "fit" of transition planning for students with disabilities who seek to matriculate through postsecondary education settings.

Context of the Study

The focus of this study was the state of transition planning for students with disabilities currently enrolled in a community college system located in central Texas. The purpose of the study was to examine Individual Transition Plans (ITPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of students who have self-declared as having disabilities and who are eligible for special assistance from college programs for students with disabilities. These students were previously graduated from public high schools and were served in special education programs within those schools. Documents reviewed were written by public school personnel during the period beginning on or before the students' sixteenth birthdays and ending with their graduation from high school. Following analysis of the students' written documents, community college disability service coordinators and students were asked to clarify information regarding transition planning gathered from the records. This clarification also served as a check on the validity of the information obtained from the records.

Definition of Terms

Students with disabilities are students with identified disabilities as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990. Categories of disabilities

according to IDEA include mentally retarded, hearing impaired, vision impaired, other health impaired, orthopedically impaired, learning disabled, seriously emotionally disturbed, autistic, and traumatic brain injured (Podemski, Marsh, Smith, & Price, 1995). *Students with disabilities* are students in this study who have progressed in public schools and who have enrolled in postsecondary education, i.e., a community college. These students have self-declared as having a learning disability and have requested assistance from the community college program for students with disabilities.

Transition, as defined in a 1984 position paper written by Madeline Will for the U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, is "an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment" (as cited in Halpern, 1993, p. 486). Wehman (1993) and Browning, Dunn, & Brown (1993) cited the definition of transition from IDEA, as it pertains specifically to students with disabilities:

> . . a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed with an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, P.L. 101-476.20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, Section 1410 (a) (19)]

Transition planning is a process in which the student, parents, school district personnel, and community representatives develop goals for independent living, employment, and postsecondary education as desired by the student. West, Corbey,

Boyer-Stephens, Jones, Miller, and Sarkees-Wircenski (1992) posited that "such planning begins early, with the expectation that students have opportunities and experiences during their school years to prepare them for postschool environments as well as time to redesign strategies along the way" (p. 3).

The Individual Transition Plan (ITP) is a document developed by school district personnel, the student, the student's parents, and appropriate representatives from agencies such as the Texas Rehabilitative Services (previously called Texas Rehabilitation Commission). The ITP is a separate document from the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The ITP should document the student's long-range goals that may include postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and participation in the community. The ITP, which identifies supports and services needed by the student to reach the desired goals, is reviewed annually. Transition services identified as being needed are included in the student's IEP [19 TAC § 89.1110].

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document developed by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee (ARD). This committee is comprised of the parent, a representative of the school district administration, the student's current special education teacher, at least one general education teacher, and the student as appropriate. The IEP must contain various elements including the following: the student's present competencies, annual goals, short-term instructional goals, and a schedule for evaluating progress on the goals [34 CFR §300.346].

Statement of the Problem

Transition from school to work or to postsecondary education is a particularly difficult process for students with disabilities. For example, Brief Report 6 of the National Center on Education Outcomes (1992) stated that "transition services are required for students with disabilities to help bridge school and adult experiences, usually employment" (p. 3). This report also noted that 85.7% of students with disabilities do not enroll in postsecondary programs. Sockne and Weiss-Castro (1994) reported that only 46% of students "with disabilities who had been out of school for up to two years were competitively employed" as compared with 69% for the general youth population (p. 1). Other researchers have commented on the dismally high rate of unemployment for students with disabilities, which sometimes ranges between 50 and 75% (Browning, Dunn, & Brown, 1993;Elrod, 1994; and Wehman, 1993). Shaw (2009) reported that according to the U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics from July, 2009, "the employment-to-population ratio for persons with disability was 19.5%, compared to 65.0% for persons with no disability"(p.1).

The *Texas Collaborative Transition Project* (1997), a longitudinal study undertaken by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, Texas Education Agency, and Texas Commission for the Blind, cited several findings regarding students with disabilities who have exited Texas public school systems. Findings were based on three separate studies: one "five-year longitudinal study of 1,000 graduating seniors receiving special education services" (p. 3); one study of "the effectiveness of transition planning for two groups of students, 16 years old and 21 years old" (p. 3); and one study which

"evaluated the quality of transition services perceived by students and families" (p. 3). The majority of the students in the three studies indicated "they had been employed for the six months prior to answering the survey" (p. 4). Wages, however, were reported to be low, with more than half of the participants in the longitudinal study reporting salaries of less than $12,000 a year. Half of the participants of both the longitudinal and the transition samples reported they received no fringe benefits. The majority of both of these two samples reported that they "did not continue their education after leaving high school. Only ten percent of both samples went to a two-year or four-year school" (p. 6). Approximately one third of both samples stated they "were not interested in and reported having no intention of pursuing a postsecondary career" (p. 6). These findings suggest that students with disabilities are not currently successful in full participation in adult society as they leave public school to enter the work force or further education.

Shaw (2009) stated that one of key challenges in education and transition for secondary students is ensuring students with disabilities have both full access to and participation in postsecondary education. Shaw contended that students with disabilities should be made aware that postsecondary education is an important and realistic goal for them. Shaw related that students with disabilities "need to know that, over a lifetime, an individual with a bachelor's degree would earn an average of $2.1 million dollars—almost twice that of a worker with a high school education" (p. 2). Shaw also held that although more students with disabilities have been attending postsecondary institutions, it is unclear as to whether they are successful. He stated:

> The reality that most students expect to access postsecondary education combined with the reality that virtually all disability categories are participating

> not only in postsecondary education but also in college requires that secondary schools offer transition planning that addresses postsecondary education goals for all students. (p. 4)

Shaw reminded educators that "President Obama's call for all Americans to complete at least one year of college is especially critical for students with disabilities" (p. 1). This study was designed to look at how well secondary schools are helping students with disabilities plan for participation in postsecondary education, particularly in the community college setting.

To understand the implications of IDEA and the STWOA on students with disabilities, it is helpful to understand the political environment prior to the passing of these two acts. Scribner (1979) described the relevant environment of a political system as "those objects that do affect a particular system . . . at a given time" (p. 350). This environment is seen as "dynamic, changing continuously over time" (p. 350). Reich (1995) described the national climate prior to the amendment of IDEA and the passing of the STWOA. During the 1980s, evidence was building that American schools were not meeting the needs of students who did not plan to go to college. Reich (1995) cited as a critical factor the release of two reports, *The Forgotten Half* and *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages*, which served to bring to the public's attention the plight of the non-college-bound student. Even before the release of these two reports Reich (1995) mentioned, *A Nation at Risk*, written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), alerted the American public to alleged deficiencies in the American school children's education which greatly imperiled American's position as a major global power. Thus, the political environment suggested an American public which

believes that changes in the way students are prepared for life after graduation from high school are needed if America is to continue to retain its position of power in the global community.

Purpose of the Study

Dunn (1996) posited that whereas the needs of individuals with moderate and severe disabilities have been "well documented, the transition needs of individuals with mild disabilities have received considerably less attention" (p. 17). Dunn contended that previously, it was thought that students with mild disabilities had fewer problems transitioning into the adult world than students with more severe disabilities. Dunn (1996) cited recent studies that challenge this view:

> Such studies indicate that compared to their nondisabled peers, individuals with mild disabilities experience (a) a higher unemployment and/or underemployment rate, (b) more restricted participation in community activities and leisure activities, (c) lower pay, (d) more dependency on parents or others, (e) more dissatisfaction with employment, and (f) higher academic failure rates in postsecondary settings. (p. 17)

She summarized that "transition planning for students with learning disabilities (LD) has probably received the least attention of any other facet of their lives . . ." (p. 17).

Wilson, Hoffman, and McLaughlin (2009) noted that special education policy such as IDEA

> focuses on improving the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities, including enrollment in college….This focus has been justified by the dismal employment outcomes for many youths with disabilities, specifically those with moderate to severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. Notwithstanding, in recent years legislation has increasingly focused on promoting enrollment in two- and four-year colleges as a means of improving employment outcomes for all students with disabilities. (p. 10)

The authors also noted that despite legislative efforts to improve postschool outcomes such as attendance in college or employment, "relatively little research has been conducted to inform practice related to transition services leading to college enrollment" (p. 1).

This study is an attempt to inform practice about transition practices by examining the relationship of the transition needs documented by public schools on the Individual Transition Plans (ITP) of students with disabilities and the services actually needed by these students as they enter postsecondary education programs. This study investigates the adequacy and "fit" of transition planning as an effective means of preparing students with disabilities for the reality of postsecondary education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this study is found in Argyris and Schön's (1974) work, *Theory in Practice*. The authors posited that a person may espouse a theory believed to guide his/her behavior. The person's actual behavior or actions, which Argyris and Schön referred to as theory-in-use or theory-in-action, may or may not contradict the espoused theory that is believed to guide his/her actions. The person may not be aware of any inconsistencies or incongruities between the espoused theory and the theory-in-use. Studying the effectiveness of an action involves an evaluation of the relationship between espoused theories and theories-in-action. This evaluation includes testing the underlying assumptions of the theories. A theory is confirmed when the action yields the predicted results. Without such testing and evaluating, a process Argyris and Schön term *self-*

sealing occurs. Without public testing, the self-sealing process can prevent needed changes.

For purposes of this study, the transition services needs of students with disabilities as documented on the students' ITPs and IEPs form the espoused theories of transition planning. The ITPs and IEPs reviewed in this study document what school personnel, students, parents, and agency representatives espouse to be the needs of students transitioning from high school into a community college setting to begin their postsecondary education. The actual transition service needs of these students once they begin their postsecondary education constitute the theory-in-use. This study focuses on the relationship between the espoused versus actual theories-in-use regarding transition planning. The effectiveness of the transition planning process is studied by comparing the espoused theory of planning with the actual transition needs as students begin their postsecondary education experience.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the extent and type of transition services needed by students with mild disabilities who enter postsecondary programs, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What transition services are documented on ITPs and IEPs as needed for students with disabilities who exit high school and enter post-secondary programs?
2. What transition services do community colleges recommend for students with disabilities who enter community colleges?

3. What is the relationship between the espoused transition needs of students with disabilities as outlined in their ITPs and IEPs and the actual needs of these students as expressed by community colleges?

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to provide insights into transition planning for students with disabilities. Transition planning is required by law for students beginning at age 16 or younger if deemed appropriate. School district personnel dedicate considerable time, effort, and resources to fulfill the transition planning requirements of IDEA, state regulations, and Texas Education Commissioner rules. One may ask, "Does the transition planning process work?" This study attempts to answer only a part of that broad question. This study focuses on transition service needs of students with disabilities who enter a community college setting.

Knowledge gained from this study could assist public school special educators to develop appropriate ITPs for students wishing to enter postsecondary programs. Appropriate transition services to high school students with disabilities could benefit postsecondary programs serving students with disabilities. For example, students who are better prepared for college entry may have a greater chance to succeed in and complete a college program. Knowledge gained from this study could inform practice in the field of special education in the areas of curriculum for secondary students with disabilities, more effective linkages among agencies serving students with disabilities, and a greater understanding of assessment needed to detect transition service needs. Public testing of espoused theories and theories-in-use regarding transition planning could result in

preventing self-sealing from limiting openness to change in the way transition planning is done. Such change could greatly improve the transition of students with disabilities into adult life.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Transition planning for secondary students with disabilities has been mandated by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) since 1990. This law was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004 to continue educational services to students with disabilities. Despite collaborative efforts between educational institutions and various service agencies to facilitate transition between school, work and/or other postsecondary settings, students with disabilities appear to lag behind their peers in terms of successful employment and completion of postsecondary education programs. In particular, there is limited knowledge of the capacities, adequacy, and "fit" of transition planning for students with disabilities who seek to matriculate through postsecondary education settings. The focus of this review of literature is upon the transition needs of students with disabilities as they enter postsecondary institutions. Legal issues, transition planning processes, transition models, and advice from transition specialists comprise this review. Specific focus is upon the needs of students with disabilities who have entered community colleges as well as the programs thought to meet the needs of these students. Argyris and Schön's (1974) espoused versus theories-in-action theory is used as a framework for analyzing transition processes of students with disabilities in the transition between high school and the community college.

Status of Students With Disabilities After Exiting High School

Each year thousands of students with disabilities exit high schools across American to embark on the journey toward adulthood. The plight of recent high school graduates with disabilities has attracted the attention of scholars. Wagner and Blackorby (1996) noted that in 1987, SRI International contracted with the Office of Special Education Programs to initiate the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS). This study presented a picture of postschool life for students with disabilities. The NLTS was based on a sample of 8,000 students with disabilities who were between the ages of 15 and 21 and who were in special education programs during the 1985-86 school year. Wagner and Blackorby (1996) summarized various statistics from the study. For example, the majority (56%) of high school graduates with disabilities had competitive employment as their goal upon graduation. Of these graduates, 28% had attendance in a postsecondary vocational training program as their goal, while 23% desired to attend college. Those who were graduated from high school comprised approximately 60% of those students with disabilities who started high school. At least 30% of the students with disabilities dropped out of high school while an additional 8% dropped out before beginning high school.

In regards to postsecondary education, Wagner and Blackorby (1996) noted that students with disabilities vary greatly from their peers without disabilities. For all students who had been out of high school between three to five years, 68% of the students without disabilities had been enrolled in postsecondary schools, while only 27% of the students with disabilities had. The NLTS results also showed that when students

with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary schools, it was usually in vocational training (16%), with 12% in two-year colleges and only 4% in four-year colleges.

The NLTS study presented some wide discrepancies between students with disabilities and students within the general population. This disparity was not initially foreseen when transition policies were developed. Reiff and deFur (1992) noted that Assistant Secretary of Education Madeline Will outlined three paths to postschool success in her 1984 policy paper "Bridges from School to Work." The first path required no special services; the second path required time-limited support; and the third path required long-term support. The assumption was that students with mild disabilities would follow the first path, requiring no special services.

A second National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) was undertaken as a 10-year study funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education. Subjects of the NLTS2 included over 11,000 students aged 13-16 years who were receiving special education services in grades 7 or above as of December, 2000. Wave 1 interviews with parents and students were conducted in 2001, with Wave 2 interviews conducted in 2003. Subjects were queried regarding their experiences in areas such as postsecondary education, employment, leisure activities, independent living, and social activities. Since the focus of the current study is postsecondary education, data from the NLTS2 was analyzed in that particular area.

Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, and Levine (2005) pointed out several NLTS2 findings regarding students with disabilities who enter postsecondary education programs. More students with disabilities tended to enroll in 2-year community colleges

than in other postsecondary education settings. About 30 percent of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education since exiting high school. This rate is less than half that of their peers without disabilities who have enrolled in postsecondary school. At the time of the NLTS2, students without disabilities were four and one-half times more likely to be enrolled in 4-year colleges than were students with disabilities. Since exiting high school, only 9 percent of the students with disabilities in the study reported attending a 4-year college.

Results of both the NLTS and NLTS 2 were reviewed and are discussed here although a majority of the students in the current study graduated from high school before 2000 which marked the inception of NLTS2. Results of NLST2 can be viewed as a corroboration of some of the researcher's findings. Despite changes in transition laws and practices since the students in the study had their transition plans developed in their local high schools, students with disabilities continue to lag behind their peers without disabilities in the area of postsecondary education.

An example from NLTS2 which illustrates the continued challenges students with disabilities face in college concerns accommodations for which they are qualified to receive from learning disability support services on campus. In order to receive educational support services in college, students must self-disclose their disability status and self-advocate to receive the needed accommodations. This disclosure is voluntary. According to Newman, Wagner, Cameto, and Knokey (2009), findings from the NLTS2 indicate that many students with disabilities do not disclose their status:

> NLTS2 findings show that more than half (55 percent) of postsecondary students who were identified by their secondary school as having a disability did not

> consider themselves to have a disability by the time they had transitioned to postsecondary school…An additional 8 percent reported considering themselves to have a disability but chose not to disclose it to their postsecondary schools. Approximately one-third of postsecondary students with disabilities identified themselves as having a disability and had informed their postsecondary schools of their disability prior to enrollment, and 3 percent considered themselves to have a disability and waited to inform the schools of their disability until after enrollment in the postsecondary institutions. (p. 27)

There seemed to be a pattern that students received less assistance for disabilities in college than they did while in high school. Newman et al. (2009) reported that 24 percent of students with disabilities reported receiving support from their postsecondary school. However, when these students were in high school, 84 percent reported that they received some type of support because of their disabilities.

Reiff and deFur (1992) pointed out that follow-up studies indicated that students with disabilities do have much more difficulty getting and maintaining employment than their peers without disabilities. The authors stated that "in spite of outcome data, special and regular educators have been reluctant to consider transition planning services as particularly important for youth with learning disabilities" (p. 239). The authors cited what appears to be a widespread belief that learning disabilities are a phenomenon manifesting itself only in schools and not in the workplace or community. The belief that students with disabilities need no specialized services to assist them in successfully entering the adult world is assumed to have hindered the provision of these services.

Haring, Lovett, and Smith (1990) stated that "the specialized service needs of adults with LD do not necessarily diminish upon high school graduation; however, the amount of special services available to them is dramatically reduced at that time" (p. 108). Not all the blame for poor outcomes for students with disabilities following

graduation can be traced to the public school, however. Also at fault is the dearth of services available through community agencies. In their study that included 64 recent graduates classified as learning disabled, the authors found that 60% were competitively employed and 35% had received postsecondary training. Interestingly, it was found that those who had received postsecondary training "were less likely to be employed than those who had not received postsecondary training" (p. 111). The authors concluded that due to the lack of specialized services available to students with disabilities, their apparent poor adjustment to adult life was not surprising.

Benz and Halpern (1993) chronicled "a consistently discouraging picture of the post-school status of school leavers with disabilities" (p. 197). They reached their conclusions after completing a study of students with disabilities who were in their last year of high school and following the students' progress for two years. They found that approximately 25-50% of the needs identified as necessary for successful transition from school to the adult community were not addressed during the transition planning process the school utilized.

Seidenberg and Koenigsberg (1990) cited the transition period from school to employment or postsecondary education as a critical period for students with disabilities who frequently do not have adequate preparation before leaving high school. For those students with disabilities planning to enter postsecondary education, lack of adequate preparation may be manifested in the areas of "inadequate knowledge of subject content, underachievement in academic areas, poor organizational skills (e.g., time management

and study skills), poor test-taking skills, lack of assertiveness, and low self-esteem" (pp. 110-111).

Fourqurean, Meisgeier, Swank and Williams (1991) posited that the difficulties encountered by students with disabilities who leave school and enter the adult world "may present a unique set of problems and limitations that are not apparent to the casual observer" (p. 400). Although many students with disabilities possess average or better intelligence, their poor academic and/or social skills severely limit their options. These authors contended that the transition into adulthood for students with disabilities too often "presents a picture of lost hope and personal defeat, as peer, family, and community expectations far exceed what is achievable" (p. 400).

Neubert, Tilson, and Ianacone (1989) noted that the transition needs of students with mild disabilities have only recently been documented despite the fact that "members of this population outnumber those with severe disabilities by a ratio of 10 to 1 and deserve increased attention pertaining to specific transition needs" (p. 494). They described a common, and erroneous, assumption that the group with mild disabilities could move with ease into the adult world. As a result of their study in which participants spent an average of 10 months on their initial jobs, with many needing additional support to handle job changes, the authors posited that "transition or employment outcomes should be viewed in terms of economic self-sufficiency, not simply as an individual's ability to access an initial job" (p. 499). Thus, despite receiving assistance procuring an initial job, students with disabilities often need continued support not anticipated by those providing transition services.

Dunn (1996) cited numerous studies that compared the status of students with disabilities with their peers without disabilities as the two groups moved from school to work or postsecondary education. These differences were: (a) a higher unemployment and/or underemployment rate, (b) more restricted participation in community activities and leisure activities, (c) lower pay, (d) more dependency on parents or others, (e) more dissatisfaction with employment, and (f) higher academic failure rates in postsecondary settings. (p. 17)

Aune (1991) reviewed studies depicting the status of students with disabilities seeking to transition to postsecondary educational settings. Such students often are unprepared for postsecondary education demands, perhaps because they have been tracked in less demanding courses of study or have been educated in special education resource classrooms. Aune (1991) also cited studies that described the difficulty students with disabilities have staying in and completing postsecondary education programs. For example, students with disabilities often take longer to complete college programs than do those without disabilities. One reason for such poor success rates for students with disabilities is that postsecondary institutions often have inadequate services available to assist students. Secondly, Aune (1991) noted that "secondary programs have not been able to close the gap in meeting the transition needs of students with learning disabilities" (p. 178).

Looking at postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, Webster and Queen (2008) noted that moving from a high school setting to a postsecondary education setting is hard for all adolescents but is especially difficult for those with learning

disabilities. The authors reported various benefits of obtaining a postsecondary education such as lower rates of employment, higher income, and a generally better quality of life. The authors also observed that another interesting benefit is that attending a postsecondary school delays adolescence and postpones adult responsibilities. Some students with disabilities profit from having a longer time to mature before fully entering adult society characterized by seeking employment, gaining financial independence, marrying, and starting their own families.

In summary, scholars have noted problems students encounter as they transition from school to work or postsecondary education. Adults do not appear to outgrow learning disabilities (Price, 2002). Ongoing support and attention are often required by adult students with disabilities. Transitioning from high school is a daunting process for all students, but it is particularly harder for students with disabilities because, "in addition to the normal upheaval in the transition to adulthood, students with disabilities exchange the security of a single contact point—special education—for the complexity of multiple systems serving adults with disabilities" (Flexer, Baer, Luft & Simmons, 2008, p. 9). Despite years of mandated transition planning and services to assist students with the passage from school to adult living, students with disabilities typically fare much worse than do their peers without disabilities in their quest for independence.

Challenges of Adults With Disabilities

Almost half of students with disabilities served in special education are classified as learning disabled (Podemski, Marsh II, Smith, & Price, 1995). Because learning disabled is the largest category of disabilities, this review of literature centers primarily

on individuals with learning disabilities. A second focus of this review is upon individuals with mild learning disabilities. Citing Minskoff and DeMoss, Dunn (1996) defined a learning disability as "mild" when the individual possesses above-average intelligence, exhibits high academic achievement, has adequate employability skills, and participates in college preparatory programs with "mainstreaming in general education classes and resource support" (p. 20).

As young adults matriculate out of secondary schools and enter the world of work or higher education, learning disabilities appear to continue. Malcom, Polatajko, and Simons (1990) noted that although some estimate as many as 15% of adults have some type of learning disability, "relatively little attention has been given to the functional deficits of adults with LD" (p. 518). In a study of 51 adults with learning disabilities, Polloway, Schewel, and Patton (1992) found that all participants interviewed "agreed that one does not really overcome a learning disability, but that one can lead a successful life by developing coping strategies" (p. 520).

Levine and Swartz (1995) described characteristics of learning disabilities characteristically found in students from "early adolescence to early adulthood" (p. 4). The four main areas of dysfunctionality include "(a) reduced attentional strength; (b) insufficient memory capacity; (c) superficial comprehension; and (d) output problems" (p. 4). Problems with attention can be manifested in academic, behavioral, or interpersonal relationship areas. Memory problems may include poor short-term memory, problems remembering different components while working on a task, slowness in retrieval, and poor pattern recognition. Superficial understanding may be described as

having problems with language processing, conceptualization, and "passive learning approaches" (p. 7). Output problems include poor written language skills, poor expressive language, and organizational problems.

In a position paper by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) (1985), the following concerns for adults with learning disabilities were discussed: (a) learning disabilities persist throughout life although the manifestations of those disabilities may change; (b) there is an inadequate assessment system available to determine learning disabilities in adults; (c) adults with learning disabilities often do not gain access to academic and vocational programs or counseling which may improve their skills; (d) there are few professionals adequately trained to provide intervention for adults with disabilities; (e) employers lack necessary knowledge and skills to work with adults with disabilities in their employ; (f) adults with disabilities may have difficulty with life tasks due to social, emotional or personal problems which may either be a result of their disabilities or a consequence of their experiences with others who do not understand their disabilities; (g) currently advocacy efforts for adults with learning disabilities are inadequate; and (h) programs for adults with learning disabilities have not been adequately supported by private, state, and federal funding agencies.

White (1992) reviewed literature in an effort to relate "what is known about adults with learning disabilities (LD) to the current knowledge base about the changing economic and technical realities of the society in which they will be living and working the 1990s" (p. 448). In the thirteen quantitative follow-up studies of adults diagnosed as specific learning disabled, learning disabled or dyslexic, most studies found

underemployment was a problem even though employment rates were above 50%. In comparison to peers without disabilities, the adults held jobs with considerably less status, i.e., jobs in production, labor, fast food, and helper occupations. White (1992) stated that even though entry level jobs might be plentiful and thus a boon to adults with disabilities, those entry level jobs "may not provide a level of income that will allow workers to live independently" (p. 452). A predicted decline in low-skilled and semiskilled jobs may "hurt persons with learning disabilities who . . . are frequently placed in production and laborer jobs" (p. 452).

White (1992) also reported that nearly all the studies reviewed documented continued problems in the areas of arithmetic, spelling, writing, and reading. Unfortunately, White (1992) predicted that not only do employers demand workers with skills in these areas, employers also need workers who can use these skills to problem solve and engage in higher level thinking. Workers must be able to use academic skills to solve problems and communicate effectively with others.

Other disturbing challenges to adults with disabilities that White (1992) noted included high dropout rates from high school and low participation rates in postsecondary education. More adults with disabilities were accessing community college programs than four-year university programs. In terms of social adjustment, most subjects in the study were single and living with parents or relatives. Adults with learning disabilities engaged in fewer leisure or social activities than did those without disabilities. White (1992) posited that "problems in social skills are significant because within the workplace social skills are very important; in fact, they may be one of the most important skills for

successful adjustment" (p. 454). In summary, learning disabilities persist into adulthood. Second, the effects of learning disabilities in adults are different from those in school-age students with disabilities. For example, learning disabilities in children are manifested as problems in academic areas while in adults they are manifested in vocational and social areas. Third, many adults with learning disabilities do not have "satisfying and meaningful lives" (White, 1992, p. 455).

Sitlington, Frank & Carson (1992) studied 911 high school graduates with mild disabilities in order to investigate their adjustment to adulthood in terms of employment and postsecondary training. The following criteria measured successful transition to adulthood: a) employed (full or part-time) in a competitive job, a homemaker, a full-time student, or in a job training program; (b) buying a home, living independently, or living with a friend; (c) paying at least a portion of their living expenses; and (d) involved in more than three leisure activities. (pp. 229-230) Three groups of recent graduates--learning disabled, behaviorally disordered, and mentally disabled--were included in the study. Using the preceding criteria for success, those judged successful in the three groups ranged from 0 to 10%. Although many professionals believe the focus of transition efforts should be on those with severe disabilities, this study suggested those categorized with mild disabilities needed more effective transition planning and services.

Mangrum and Strichart (1984) described typical characteristics of college students with learning disabilities. These students may exhibit any of the following traits: cognitive problems (including fund of information, understanding abstractions, deductive reasoning, and attention to task); language problems (including understanding spoken

language, using words appropriately, using written language skills, and organizing thoughts when writing); perceptual-motor problems (including fine motor coordination and spatial relations); academic problems (including deficits in reading, spelling, handwriting, and mathematics); problems with work and study habits (including organizational skills, task completion, using a library, taking accurate notes, and outlining); social problems (including developing interpersonal relationships and using appropriate social behaviors); and affective problems (including problems with self-concept, self-confidence, and motivation. Mangrum and Strichart (1984) posited that it is important to recognize and respond to these possible characteristics when developing programs for college students with disabilities.

Needs of Students With Disabilities In Postsecondary Programs

The challenges of learning disabilities persist into adulthood (Patton & Polloway, 1992). For those young adults choosing to pursue postsecondary education, learning disabilities can pose a series of unique needs. Ryan and Price (1992) posited that young adults need assistance in transitioning out of secondary and postsecondary settings into adult life. Emphasis on life skills that foster independence should be a part of transition planning. Ryan and Price (1992) also contended that "it cannot be stated too many times that one plank in the foundation for successful transition from secondary to postsecondary settings is a clear, realistic knowledge of one's own disability" (p. 10). Another element in successful transition into or out of postsecondary settings is the skill of making informed choices. Students with disabilities may need assistance in "making

such crucial decisions as where to go to school, what to major in, and what type of career to pursue" (p. 10).

Ryan and Price (1992) further noted that since the mid-1980s, there has been a tenfold increase in the number of students with disabilities entering higher education programs. This increase in students with disabilities accessing higher education has created various specific needs for these students:

> For postsecondary students with learning disabilities, decreased student-teacher contact, greater academic competition, more emphasis on time management, and personal responsibility, and the need for self-motivation and independence are critical, inter-related issues that should be confronted before students enter higher education. Other skills, such as understanding one's learning disabilities and comprehending how this self-knowledge transfers into different settings, are vital to postsecondary educational success. Consequently, it is no accident that "disability awareness" may be one of the key phrases for the 1990s. (p. 11)

Siperstein (1988) presented a three-stage transition model for students with learning disabilities who are in college settings. In stage one, the student's interest in college is supported by supplying needed information about college options. At this point, an individualized plan is developed which would include such elements as identifying resources, identifying learning needs and how to accommodate them, and developing an appropriate plan of study. Stage two of the transition plan deals with managing the social and academic challenges of college. Siperstein (1988) included the following problems college students with disabilities have identified: "assessing and making use of college services, identifying new ways to learn and study, finding a niche or group of friends, learning to become their own advocates, and establishing effective teacher/student relationships with faculty" (p. 433). The third stage is transition from college to the world of work. College students with disabilities at this stage of transition

need assistance in developing a career plan, identifying strategies for job searches, and developing skills in maintaining a job. Siperstein (1988) posited that such a three-stage transition plan could assist students with disabilities to enter postsecondary education programs, succeed while in college, and become successful at gaining employment after college.

Nelson and Lignugaris/Kraft (1989) reviewed current literature to determine the types of services provided in postsecondary settings and those needed by students with disabilities. They found the following services to be common: personal counseling, academic counseling, career counseling, instructional accommodations, and administrative accommodations. The provision of services appeared to vary based on factors such as the amount of resources allocated to such services, the expected skill level of students entering the program, and the mission of the college. For example, “typically, 4-year institutions have emphasized remedial training less than have community colleges" (p. 263).

McGuire, Hall and Litt (1991) conducted a study of students with disabilities to determine postsecondary service needs. The “overwhelming needs of LD students in this study fell into areas of study strategies and written expression” (p. 104). The results are “indicative of a global ‘organizational’ deficit that is frequently found in LD students and persists into adulthood” (p. 104). The authors advocated that secondary school students gain skills for transitioning into postsecondary settings. Secondary programs should include “instruction in learning strategies, the process of writing, and self-advocacy skills” (p. 106).

As students with disabilities move from high school to college settings, "many changes occur which serve to compound this already difficult transition" (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987, p. 176). These changes include the following: Contact between teacher and student decreases; academic competition is stiffer in college; there is generally a change in the student's "personal support network"; and "learning disabled students move from an environment wherein they are carefully guided and individually instructed to a setting wherein they are expected to achieve on their own" (p. 177).

Differences Between High School and Postsecondary Education

An important, recurring idea in current transition literature is that students with disabilities who are exiting high school and who plan to attend some type of postsecondary education need to be aware of the vast differences between their current setting in school and what they can except as they begin college or further education programs. Likewise, parents are often unaware of the differences in the two settings relating to legal issues and services available to their adult children. Literature on transition planning seems to promote recognizing these differences and using them as possible sources for IEP goals and developing ITPs. Thoma, Bartholomew and Scott (2009) pointed out that the major difference is that "students—not their teachers, parents or guidance counselors-are held responsible for their academic success" (p. 129).

Paiewonsky and Ostergard (2010) listed the following differences between high school and college, which they believe are important for individuals with disabilities to consider during the transition process:

1) curriculum accommodations in college versus curriculum modifications in high school,

2) student responsibility to articulate needs versus the school personnel's responsibility to provide special education,
3) special education entitlements versus eligibility and budgetary limitations for adult services,
4) school schedules and vacations versus the academic calendar and semester breaks, and
5) higher expectations for student responsibility. (p. 123)

Smith and Young (2004) noted various other differences between high school and college: In college there may not be as many accommodations available; length in class time is different; there are usually more students per class in college; there are fewer tests or chances to produce work for grading in college; college teachers use different techniques such as lecturing and requiring more library research; and the individual student has more responsibility in time management.

Students with disabilities and their parents should also be aware of the difference in legal mandates between high school and college (Conway & Chang, 2005). Shaw, Madaus, and Banerjee (2009) urged students to differentiate the "rights and responsibilities provided by IDEA in P-12 from those under Section 504 in postsecondary education" (p. 187). Public secondary schools provide services to students with disabilities under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 which requires schools to provide identification, assessment, and individualized programming for student with disabilities at no cost to them. Colleges are subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disabilities Act, both of which are civil rights laws. Students in postsecondary settings must be qualified for admission into the school and must maintain grades which are required for continued eligibility. Students with disabilities must self-disclose their disability and provide documentation to verify

the nature of the disability, often at their own expense. In college, students must monitor their own progress and self-advocate for needed accommodations.

Shaw (2009) explained differences between high school and college regarding parent involvement. Parents are often advocates for their children with disabilities as they navigate the public school system. Parents often intervene in planning and are offered participation in all decisions regarding their children. In contrast, parents of college students "have little, if any, standing practically or legally in postsecondary education, particularly college…The student, not the parent, is the one who plans the program, presents the documentation, requests needed accommodations, and monitors the efficacy of accommodations" (p. 6).

Brinckerhoff, McGuire and Shaw (2002) discussed academic differences between high school and postsecondary education. Class time in college is generally shorter than in high school. In high school, students attend classes five days a week for approximately six hours a day. College classes may meet only one to three times weekly. In high school students are often able to complete homework assignments in class. In college, the expectation is that students invest three to four hours a day in studying, with the emphasis being on independent learning. There is often less teacher feedback in college. Grading is based on fewer tests or projects each semester. While students with disabilities in high school may be graded on effort and level of improvement, college grades are based on mastery of course content. Additionally, the authors reported that college students with disabilities may "find themselves in academic environments with

high-achieving high school graduates where expectations are greater and grading is even more competitive" (p. 31).

These reported differences between high school and college can create dramatically challenging demands for students with disabilities. According to the transition literature, the differences students may experience when transitioning to college should be discussed during the transition planning process and should be addressed in IEPs and ITPs.

What is Transition?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as amended in 1990 added the requirement that school districts provide transition services to students with disabilities. Since then these requirements have been affirmed and strengthened in the IDEA amendments of 1997 and 2004. Hakola (1996) contended that "this mandate was created due to Congressional concern that high-school age students in special education remained at risk of dropping out of school or otherwise leaving the school setting unprepared for adult life and responsibility" (p. 1). In describing the period during which adolescents leave secondary schools and embark upon adult life, Halpern (1993) noted that "even at its best, this period of transition is usually accompanied by a strong sense of floundering as young people attempt to sort out the lessons of their childhood and move into effective adult roles in their communities" (p. 486). Halpern (1993) noted various factors influencing the ease with which students could transition from school to adult life:

> family background, the quality and impact of the student's high school program, the nature and quality of transition services that are provided to the student and his or her family, opportunities in the community that are actually available for

> the young person, and the readiness and motivation exhibited by the young person to move forward with his or her life. (p. 486)

Tracing the history of the transition mandate, Halpern (1993) noted an early attempt by the U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that defined transition in terms of employment. Madeline Will's position paper for OSERS, written in 1984, defined transition as "an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment" (as cited in Halpern, 1993, p. 486). Will's position paper spurred many states to begin transition services. Patton and Dunn (1998) noted that the 1990 amendments to IDEA mandated transition services for "all students who were eligible for special education services" (p. 14). Thus, all states had to comply with these federal regulations. Although the 1990 amendments mandated transition services be in place prior to age 16, or earlier if appropriate, the 1997 amendments to IDEA mandate that transition needs be documented prior to age 14. IDEA 2004 again placed the age of transition planning to on or before age 16, giving states latitude to begin transition planning earlier if deemed appropriate for the student.

Citing the Individuals with Disabilities Act, Repetto and Correa (1996) defined transition as

> a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to postschool activities including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities must be based on individual needs; preferences; interests; areas of instruction; community experiences; the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives; and if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (34 CFR 300.18). (p. 553)

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) (1993) presented a summary of transition issues based on the requirements of IDEA. Besides the typical members of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting (e.g., the parent, the teacher, and a school representative), the school is required to invite to the transition planning meeting the student and a representative from any public agency which will be responsible for providing or funding transition services. If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the school must develop a method for presenting the student's interests and preferences as they relate to the transition process. This committee of IEP members determines what transition services are needed. In order to determine what transition services are needed, NICHCY advocated asking questions such as the following:

- What competencies and knowledge does the student need in order to move successfully into employment (postsecondary education, adult services, independent living, community participation, etc)?
- What skills and knowledge does the student have at present in each of these areas? Is functional vocational evaluation necessary to determine the student's level of skills?
- What knowledge and skills does the student still need to acquire? (p. 5)

The transition services for which the school is responsible as well as the responsibilities and linkages between agencies must be stated in the student's IEP. NICHCY posited that such linkages between the school and various agencies are critical to the smooth transition between school and adult life because

> as students with disabilities leave the public school system, their entitlement to educational, vocational, and other services ends. In the place of one relatively organized service provider (the school system), there may now be a confusing array of many service providers (i.e., the local vocational rehabilitation agency, the state department of mental health, developmental disabilities councils,

> community service boards, the federal social security system, and so on). Individuals with disabilities who have left school become solely responsible for identifying where to obtain the services they need and for demonstrating their eligibility to receive services. (p. 7)

Inherent in this planning process is the school's responsibility if any of the adult service agencies fail to carry out their responsibilities as outlined in the IEP. The school must ask the IEP team to consider "alternate ways of meeting a student's transition objectives" (p. 8).

Besides following the legal requirements for transition planning, several scholars have recommended important elements to consider. Rojewski (1992) reviewed nine model transition programs. He noted seven exemplary components that facilitate the transition process: individualized transition planning, either as a part of the IEP or as a "stand-alone document" (p. 137); integration into normalized settings, such as the classroom, workplace or community; paid work experience; family support and involvement; collaboration between the school and adult service agencies; assistance in job seeking and/or job placement; and follow-along or follow-up to provide students with needed support and to evaluate transition outcomes.

In a study by Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, and Benz (1995), the authors found six predictors of participation in postsecondary education. These predictors were:

1. High scores on a functional achievement inventory.
2. Completing instruction successfully in certain relevant areas.
3. Participating in transition planning.
4. Parent satisfaction with instruction received by the student.
5. Student satisfaction with instruction received.
6. Parent perception that the student no longer needed help in certain critical skill areas. (p. 160)

Interestingly, the authors found several demographic variables that were not effective predictors of smooth transition to postsecondary education: "student gender, student ethnicity, family income (as a surrogate for socioeconomic status); and primary disability category" (p. 161). Based on these results, the authors hypothesized that "policy and program development efforts for improving participation in postsecondary education should focus more on specific program improvement efforts than on overcoming biases based on demographic status" (p. 161). The authors posited that although demographic variables may be predictive of employment, they may not be predictive in the case of participation in postsecondary education.

Patton and Dunn (1998) posited that successful transition planning consists of three elements. The first element is comprehensive planning which should be based on "a thorough needs assessment. . . examining the individual, or family, who will be going through a transition, as well as closely looking at the receiving setting into which the individual will be going" (p. 3). The second component of the comprehensive planning is the development of an individual plan of action based on the needs assessment. The second key element of successful transition is effective implementation of the plan of action. The authors cautioned that transition efforts may suffer "from two potential threats: (1) not being executed as planned and (2) some important aspects not being done because the needs assessment and/or the planning phase were performed inadequately" (p. 3). The third key element consists of the coordination and collaboration of all parties involved in the transition. For example, transition from school to postsecondary

educational institutions would require coordination between the public school and appropriate adult service providers.

Suggested Components in Writing Transition Plans

An important area in transition literature addressed critical components which various scholars viewed as essential in writing effective individual transition plans. A survey of the literature revealed several recurring suggestions for important elements of transition plans particularly for students desiring to exit high school and attend postsecondary institutions. The following sections present the most frequently occurring elements in fifty-eight sources in which planning for transition to postsecondary education was discussed. Each component is described with citations of those making the recommendation for inclusion as a component in the transition plans for postsecondary education. Sources reviewed included writings appearing after the initial description of transition services presented by Madeline Will in a position paper for OSERS in 1984 (as cited in Halpern, 1993) and continuing into the current year of 2010.

Three recent systematic reviews of transition studies supporting the efficacy of planning for students with disabilities desiring to attend postsecondary education and/or to gain employment serve as helpful examples of how the researcher was able to deduce from the literature which elements of an ITP are most crucial for student success. Test, Fowler, et al. (2009) reviewed 1,306 articles published between 1984 and 2008 and found 240 which "were identified as potentially contributing to the evidence base for identifying secondary transition practices" (p. 118). Thirty-two evidence-based transition practices were identified such as self-advocacy and promoting student participation in

transition planning. Cobb and Alwell (2009) reviewed 31 transition studies finding recurring themes such as student-focused planning, significant influence of the student's family, and career development activities. Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009) analyzed 22 transition-related studies and found 16 categories correlated to improved outcomes for students exiting high school. Some of these categories were inclusion in the general curriculum, self-advocacy, interagency collaboration, parental support, and social skills.

In like manner, the researcher studied fifty-eight transition-related studies, articles, books, and interventions to identify the following twelve critical components for effective transition planning. Because some of the studies included in the researcher's review of literature as well as some of those included in the three systematic reviews noted above are rather dated (spanning 30 years of research), some of the terms presented are also dated compared to current practice. For example, *mainstreaming* is used in many of the older sources while *inclusion or general curriculum* seems to be the current accepted phrase. The researcher has tried to present such usages in context, while using the more recent vocabulary in general remarks.

Self-advocacy/self determination. An important skill needed for students wishing to attend postsecondary education is self-advocacy or self-determination. Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) have referred to individuals who display self-determination as "causal agents" in that "they are actors in their lives instead of being acted upon; they make things happen in their lives" (p.440). Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) have broken down self-advocacy into the components of self-knowledge, knowledge of legal rights, ability to communicate, and displaying

leadership. Anctil, Ishikawa, and Scott (2008) described the "integrative self-determination themes of persistence, competence, career decision-making, and self-regulation" (p, 164). This skill can be described as knowing what one wants, knowing what one is legally entitled to based on one's disability, and assuming responsibility for one's goals (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008; Bateman, 1995; Blalock & Patton, 1996; Brinckerhoff, 1994; Carter, Lane, Pierson & Stang, 2008; Durlak, Rose & Bursuck, 1994; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Karge, Patton, & de la Garza, 1992; Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder & Algozzine, 2004; Martin, 1995: Morningstar et al., 2010; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Sebag, 2010; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler & McGuire, 1989; Stewart & Lillie, 1995; Test, Fowler et al., 2009; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Thoma & Getzel, 2005; Thoma, Bartholomew, & Scott, 2009; Thoma & Wehmeyer, 2005; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, Abery, Methaug, & Stancliff, 2003; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; and Woods, Sylvester, & Martin, 2010.)

Knowledge of postsecondary options and community resources. It is recommended that students wishing to attend college gain knowledge about what resources are available in the community, what colleges offer in their fields of interest, and what services are available to assist them in the college they may choose (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002; Chambers, Rabren, & Dunn, 2009; Cobb, 2007; Greenbaum, Graham & Scales, 1995; Karge, Patton & de la Garza, 1992; Miller, Snider & Rzonca, 1990; National Information Center for Children and Youths with Disabilities, 1993; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; West, Corbey, Boyer-Stephens, Jones, Miller & Sarkees-Wircenski, 1992)

Study skills. Many transition experts have noted the importance of good study skills, including organizational skills and time management, for students enrolled in college (Adelman, O'Connell, Rosenberg & Gladstone, 1995; Brinkerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002; Cobb, 2007; Dolber, 1996; National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1993; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler & McGuire, 1989; and Stewart & Lillie, 1995).

Self-understanding. Several scholars advocated that students with disabilities should have a good understanding of their disability, their strengths, and their weaknesses (Adelman, O'Connell, Rosenberg & Gladstone, 1995; Aune, 1991; Cobb, 2007; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; Dolber, 1996; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Greenbaum, Graham & Scales, 1995; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler & McGuire, 1989; Stewart & Lillie, 1995; and U. S. Department of Education, 2007).

Academic competencies. Students desiring to go to college need basic academic competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics and knowledge of the type and level of academic skill necessary for college (Adelman, O'Connell, Rosenberg & Gladstone, 1995; Chambers, Rabren, & Dunn, 2009; Levinson, 1998; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; and Stewart & Lillie, 1995).

Mainstreaming/Inclusion. Some scholars believed that in addition to basic competencies, students going to college should have classes in the general curriculum

(Kohler, 1993; and Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990), especially college preparatory classes (Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Smith & Young, 2004; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; and Wehman, 1992).

Social skills/self-esteem. Being competent using social skills, developing appropriate interpersonal relationships, and having good self-esteem were recommended by some transition experts (Dolber, 1996; Kohler, 1993; Miller, Snider & Rzonca, 1990; National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Price, 2002; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; Stewart & Lillie, 1995; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; and Wehman, 1992).

Interagency collaboration. Another crucial transition component for students going to college is linkage with adult agencies, particularly those involved with postsecondary institutions (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; deFur & Patton, 1999; Karge, Patton & de la Garza, 1992; Kohler, 1993; Miller, Lombard & Corbey, 2007; Morningstar et al., 2010; Preparing for postsecondary education, 2004; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009 and Wehman, 1992).

Knowledge of accommodations. Transition plans should include consideration of the knowledge of the accommodations the student needs based on the particular disability and the ability to request or access those accommodations (Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002; Cobb, 2007; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1993; Preparing for postsecondary education, 2004; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler & McGuire, 1989; and Smith & Young, 2004).

Participation in transition planning. Participation in transition planning by the student and the parent or family is seen as highly important for successful transition to postsecondary education (Aune, 1991; Cobb & Alwell, 2009; deFur & Patton, 1999; Karge, Patton & de la Garza, 1992; Kohler, 1993; Levinson, 1998; Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004; Morningstar et al., 2010; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler & McGuire, 1989; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Webster & Queen, 2008; Wehman, 1992; Wehman, Morningstar & Husted, 1999; Wehmeyer, 2007; and West, Corbey, Boyer-Stephens, & Jones, 1999).

Financial assistance. Lastly, students with disabilities who wish to pursue a college education should have access to information about financial aid and possible additional expenses which may be considered disability related, including special equipment, services such as readers or note takers, transportation and medical expenses (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; Getzel, 2005; HEATH Resource Center, 2007; Miller, Lombard, & Corbey, 2007; Preparing for postsecondary education, 2004; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; and Stodden & Whelley, 2004).

Table 2.1
Sources for ITP Components

Component	Source
Self-advocacy/self-determination	Anctil et al. ,2008; Bateman, 1995; Blalock & Patton, 1996; Brinkerhoff, 1994; Carter et al, 2008; Durlak et al., 1994; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Karge et at., 1992; Karvonen et al., 2004; Martin, 1995; Morningstar et al., 2010; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996;Shaw et al., 1989; Stewart & Lillie, 1995; Test, Fowler et al., 2009; Test, Fowler, Wood et al., 2005; Test Mazzotti et al., 2009; Thoma & Getzel, 2005; Thoma et al., 2009; Thoma & Wehmeyer, 2005; Sebag, 2010; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, Abery et al., 2003; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran et al., 2000; Woods et al., 2010.
Knowledge of postsecondary options and community resources	Blalock & Patton, 1996; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Chambers et al.,2009; Cobb, 2007; Greenbaum et al., 1995; Karge et al., 1992; Miller et al., 1990; National Conference Center for Children and Youths with Disabilities, 1993; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; West et al., 1992.
Study skills	Adelman et al., 1995; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Cobb, 2007; Dolber, 1996; National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1993; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; Shaw et al., 1989; Stewart & Lillie, 1995.
Self-understanding	Adelman et al., 1995; Aune, 1991; Cobb, 2007; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; Dolber, 1996; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Greenbaum et al., 1995; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Shaw et al., 1989; Stewart & Lillie, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

Academic competencies	Adelman et al., 1995; Chambers et al., 2009; Levinson, 1998; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; Stewart & Lillie, 1995.
Mainstreaming/Inclusion	Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Kohler, 1993; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990; Smith & Young, 2004; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; Wehman, 1992.
Social skills/self-esteem	Dolber, 1996; Kohler, 1993; Miller et al., 1990; National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Price, 2002; Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990, Stewart & Lillie, 1995; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Wehman, 1992.
Interagency collaboration	Cobb & Alwell, 2009; deFur & Patton, 1999; Karge et al., 1992; Kohler, 1993; Miller et al., 2007; Morningstar et al., 2010; Preparing for post-secondary education, 2004; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Wehman, 1992.
Knowledge of accommodations	Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Cobb, 2007; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1993; Preparing for postsecondary education, 2004; Shaw et al., 1989; Smith & Young, 2004.
Parent participation/student participation	Aune, 1991; Cobb & Alwell, 2009; deFur & Patton, 1999; Karge et al., 1992; Kohler, 1993; Levinson, 1998; Mason et al., 2004; Morningstar et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 1989, Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Webster & Queen, 2008; Wehman, 1992; Wehman, Monringstar & Husted, 1999; Wehmeyer, 2007; West et al., 1999.
Financial assistance	Brinckerhoff et al., 2002; Council for Exceptional Children, 1997; Getzel, 2005; HEATH Resource Center, 2007; Miller et al., 2007; Preparing for post-secondary education, 2004; Region XI Education Service Center, 1996; Stodden & Whelley, 2004.

Theory to Frame the Problem: Argyris and Schön

Despite the concerted efforts spanning nearly a decade, many students with disabilities who exit secondary schools continue to have great difficulty developing successful adult lives (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Dunn, 1996; and Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). The question is: Why, with legal requirements, apparent compliance and dedicated efforts, do students not experience greater success in transitioning to adult life? The theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön as presented in their work, *Theory in Practice* (1974), may serve as a basis for analyzing and understanding the transition process.

Argyris and Schön posited that there could be a fundamental difference between what people espouse as the basis of their actions and the theories upon which they actually act. Argyris and Schön stated:

> When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories. (pp. 6-7)

According to Argyris and Schön, theories-in-use are "operational theories of action" as distinguished from espoused theories which are "used to describe and justify behavior" (p. viii). *Theory of action* is a term used "to replace the terms *skill* and *strategy*" (p.viii). They further indicated that "we cannot learn what someone's theory-in-use is simply by asking him. We must construct his theory-in-use from observations of his behavior" (p. 7).

Theories-in-use are seen as a means of getting what one wants and maintaining various types of consistencies in life. They shape or create one's behavioral world. Argyris and Schön contended that "the formation or modification of a theory-in-use is itself a learning process" (p. 18). Argyris and Schön, citing Ashby's (1952) concept of single-loop and double-loop learning, posited that in single-loop learning, one learns to "adopt new action strategies to achieve [one's] governing variables" (p. 18). In double-loop learning, one learns to change the governing variables themselves. As an example, the authors presented the following: "In the context of theories-in-use, a person engages in single-loop learning, for example, when he learns new techniques for suppressing conflict. He engages in double-loop learning when he learns to be concerned with the surfacing and resolution of conflict rather than with its suppression" (p. 19). The authors contended that neither type of learning is superior to the other type. Single-loop learning helps one to vary action strategies within a program. Double-loop learning helps one to evaluate one's existent programs and to make changes accordingly.

Theories-in-use can be analyzed and evaluated by asking the following questions: "Are the theories-in-use and espoused theories internally consistent? Are they congruent? Are they testable? Are they effective? Do we value the worlds they create?" (p. 20). Congruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use occurs when "one's behavior fits his espoused theory of action" (p. 23). Effectiveness depends upon "the governing variables held within the theory; the appropriateness of the strategies advanced by the theory; and the accuracy and adequacy of the assumptions of the theory" (p. 24). The authors posited that a theory-in-use is testable if "one can specify the situation, the

desired result, and the action through which the result is to be achieved" (p. 25). If the action yields its predicted results, the theory is confirmed. Not only should the theory be tested or evaluated, the world created by that theory should also be evaluated.

Based on a study of 195 professionals and graduate students, Argyris and Schön developed model I, "a model of prevailing theories-in-use in our society" (p. 35). They defined their model in terms of governing variables, action strategies, and assumptions. Governing variables included defining goals, maximizing winning, and being rational. Action strategies included controlling tasks, protecting others and protecting oneself. Underlying assumptions included the belief that others act according to model I assumptions and that publicly testing assumptions is risky. Group norms tend to support the model. The authors coined the term *self-sealing* to describe the "process in which the actor is cut off from discovering the possibility of a behavior world in which these assumptions did not hold true" (p. 80). Self-sealing occurs when an actor becomes defensive and resistant to publicly testing his/her assumptions because such testing is deemed too risky to tolerate. Self-sealing is particularly problematic because "it prevents the improvement of congruency, consistency, and effectiveness of theories-in-use by preventing learning" (p. 86).

In sharp contrast to model I, the authors presented model II, "a model of theories-in-use that is free of the dysfunctionalities of model I" (p. 85). These dysfunctionalities include the stress on winning, self-protection, and competition. Governing variables of model II included maximizing informed choice based on valid information and maximizing commitment to those choices. Action strategies stress cooperation and

mutual protection between actors. The authors posited several advantages of acting according to the principles of model II. First of all, they stated:

> If individuals behave according to the governing variables and action strategies of model II, others will tend to see them as minimally defensive and open to learning, as facilitators, collaborators, and people who hold their theories-in-use firmly (because they are internally committed to them) but are equally committed to having them confronted and tested. (p. 91)

Other advantages of model II include openness to change, opportunities for both single-loop and double-loop learning, and the avoidance of self-sealing processes. The process of moving from model I to model II occurs as the individual becomes aware of the components of the model, becomes aware of inconsistencies in each governing variable, makes the choice to reduce ineffectiveness caused by variables in model I, begins to alter his/her behavior, and then publicly tests "the new insights against actual behavior" (p. 134).

Argyris and Schön viewed model II as being an appropriate framework upon which to develop theories of practice. Professionals building theories of practice can use model II to help reform their professions. For example, competent professionals following model II would be able to diagnose inconsistencies within their theories-in-use and espoused theories. The professionals would be able to publicly test their theories and to "confront themselves with the conflict of values implicit in these incongruities" (p. 196). Argyris and Schön called for professionals to reflect on the underlying theories upon which they base their practices and to change their theories-in-use as warranted. In this manner, professional growth can occur and the transition from model I to model II can be accomplished.

Theory of Argyris and Schön Applied to Transition Planning

Application of various concepts of Argyris and Schön's theory can be made in the case of transition planning practices. Transition plans written for students with disabilities can be viewed as a result of espoused theories held by policymakers, educators, parents, and representatives from public service agencies. Transition plans are an attempt to rationalize and predict what students will need to prepare them for adult living. Students' actual needs and behaviors in the adult settings constitute theory-in-use.

Given Argyris and Schön's conceptual framework, it is possible to design studies to test the congruence between the espoused theories of practitioners regarding transition needs, as documented in the Individual Transition Plans (ITP) of students with disabilities who enter postsecondary education programs, and their actual needs, or theories-in-use, once they begin such programs. If discrepancies are noted between the espoused transition needs documented on the ITP and the actual needs reported by students with disabilities in programs of higher education, such discrepancies may serve to inform practitioners about how to create a more effective transition planning processes.

In many secondary schools, there are few mechanisms or data developed to support the recommended double-loop learning. Follow-up studies of recent high school graduates who were enrolled in special education programs are rare. Educators involved in transition planning, therefore, have limited feedback whether or not their espoused theories have been successful with their students. The likelihood of a self-sealing process occurring in these schools is great. Conducting studies based on Argyris and Schön's concepts could mitigate against this self-sealing process. Questions asked in such studies

could include those based on Argyris and Schön's suggestions: Are these espoused theories of transition testable and effective? Do we value the world created for the student by these espoused theories? The contribution of such studies to the field of practice in special education could encompass an enhanced curriculum for secondary students with disabilities, more effective linkages among agencies serving students with disabilities, and a greater understanding of assessment needed to detect transition service needs.

Need for Studies on Transition Planning

This study was proposed to fill a gap in the literature concerning transition planning for students with disabilities who wish to enter postsecondary education. Part of the problem regarding the void in this particular area of research is that "many professionals do not feel that adolescents with learning disabilities (LD) require systematic transition planning" (Sitlington, 1996, p. 31). There appears to be an underlying assumption on the part of some that because many students have only mild learning disabilities, they should be able to enter the workforce or postsecondary education settings with the same ease as their peers who have no disabilities. Other scholars disagree and have proposed the need for several types of transition studies.

One recommended area of study is the need for follow-up or follow-along studies of students with disabilities who have exited secondary schools. Citing Halpern, Rojewski (1992) posited that

> transition programs are being developed without any clear understanding of the overall effectiveness of program services or the impact of such programs on students' community adjustment outcomes. In addition to these general concerns, limited resources, a changing workforce, new legislative mandates, and a

> changing view about the need for ongoing services for persons with mild disabilities require increased evaluation of program and student outcomes. (p. 148)

Rojewski (1992) recommended that follow-up or follow-along studies be conducted by those delivering transition services to students with disabilities to ensure quality of services. Likewise, Nelson and Lignugaris/Kraft (1989) called for longitudinal studies that track what students with disabilities do after high school graduation and that "identify the services that students found most useful" (p. 264).

A second area of need for transition studies as found in the literature is that of the effectiveness of postsecondary services for students with disabilities (Miller, Rzonca, & Snider, 1991; Saracoglu, Minden, & Wilchesky, 1989; and Weiss & Repetto, 1998). Vogel and Adelman (1992) noted that despite growing enrollment of students with disabilities into college programs, few of these institutions conduct systematic evaluation of such factors as the students' "academic performance or graduation and attrition rates" (p. 430).

A third area of continued need for study is that of effective transition practices. According to Furney, Hasazi, and Destefano (1997),

> Research and evaluation activities are critical to understanding and improvement practice. The establishment and continuation of transition policies, services, collaborative teams, and capacity-building activities need to be informed by research and evaluation efforts that document what practices work well and what areas are in need of improvement. (p. 353)

Collet-Klingenberg (1998) posited that "there exits little research on the intricacies of real-life practices and the effects of those practices on outcomes and experiences of students" (p. 76). She expressed concern that transition programs are

being implemented without regard to the effectiveness of such programs and without built-in methods of evaluation and improvement of such programs. Therefore, according to Collet-Klingenberg (1998), "questions remain regarding what teachers are actually doing to address the transition needs of secondary-aged students, the match between what teachers are doing and what the literature identifies as best-practice, and the effects of actual transition practices" (p. 68). The proposed study is an effort to address, at least partially, some of those questions.

Conclusion

Despite efforts by legislators, educators, parents, students, and representatives from adult service providers, the transition from school to postschool settings for students with disabilities continues to be marked by "a period of floundering that occurs for at least the first several years after leaving school as adolescents attempt to assume a variety of adult roles in their communities" (Halpern, 1992, p. 203). Framing the problem of developing successful transition practices for students with disabilities by using the theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön may help educators to view transition in a new way. As suggested by Argyris and Schön, educators should reflect on the incongruence between their espoused theories of transition and actual theories-in-use and should engage in double-loop learning if changes in underlying assumptions about transition are to be made. Self-sealing processes should be recognized and avoided. Moving to a model of transition based on Argyris and Schön's model II could result in increased reflection on behaviors, public testing of espoused theories and theories-in-use,

and openness to change, all of which could greatly improve the transition of students with disabilities into adult life.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The present study is an outgrowth of a project begun by the author in her capacity as a special education instructional supervisor for a central Texas school district. Morse (1994) urged that "the key to selecting a qualitative research topic is to identify something that will hold one's interest over time" (p. 220). In similar vein, Marshall and Rossman (1989) posited that "the researcher begins with interesting, curious, or anomalous phenomena, which he observes, discovers, or stumbles across" (p. 21). The topic of this study, transition planning for students with disabilities, is one with which the author has worked for a number of years in her capacity as a special educator. The idea for this study arose from a focus group on transition services conducted by the author with a group of educational diagnosticians, associate school psychologists, and speech pathologists, all of whom have served as members of individual transition planning teams within the school district.

The current study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods designed to investigate the relationship between individual transition plans for students with disabilities planning to enter community college settings and the actual needs of those students once in a college program. This chapter presents a brief overview of characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research methods. A more detailed description of quantitative and qualitative methods and designs incorporating a combination of methodologies is presented in Appendix A: Essential Characteristics of

Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods. This appendix provides insight into the manner in which the researcher justified the methodological design of the study. Also included in this chapter are a description of the study design, including the selection of the site of the study and the selection of the subjects; a description of data collection procedures; and a description of data analysis. Lastly, limitations of the study are discussed. The audience for this study includes public school administrators of special education programs, transition coordinators, special educators who serve on Individual Transition Plan (ITP) and Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams, and coordinators of community college programs for students with disabilities.

Overview of Research Methods

A comparison of qualitative and quantitative research methods helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each method and to provide a manner in which these disparate paradigms can complement each other. Weinreich (2006) contrasted the two approaches to research. Quantitative research adopts methods from the physical sciences and focuses on "objectivity, generalizability, and reliability" (p. 1). The researcher remains external to the research. Results are "expected to be replicable no matter who conducts the research" (p. 1). Weinreich explained that this type of research produces quantifiable data which are usually generalizable to a bigger population. She noted that "this paradigm breaks down when the phenomenon under study is difficult to measure or quantify" (p. 2). A drawback of this method is that it may "decontextualize human behavior" (p. 2), in such a way as to remove the event studied from its natural world

setting. This method may also disregard effects of variables which were not included in the development of the model.

Weinreich contrasts the characteristics of qualitative methodology in which the researcher becomes immersed in the culture or situation studied and has "direct interaction with the people under study" (p. 2). This method tends to be subjective, with the generation of hypotheses as the data is collected and analyzed. Because the researcher "becomes the instrument of data collection…results may vary greatly depending upon who conducts the research" (p. 2). Qualitative methods usually produce "rich detailed data that leave the participants' perspectives intact" (p. 2). While quantitative research focuses on correlations between various variables in the study, qualitative research focuses on processes and "reasons why" (p. 2). A drawback is that the qualitative approach can be time-consuming and laborious to execute.

Weinreich (2006) discussed how the two differing paradigms can be integrated and proposed four different models of integration:

> In the first approach, qualitative methods contribute to the development of quantitative instruments, such as the use of focus groups in questionnaire construction. The second model consists of a primarily quantitative study that uses qualitative results to help interpret or explain the quantitative findings. In the third approach, quantitative results help interpret predominantly qualitative findings, as when focus group participants are asked to fill out survey questionnaires at the session. In the fourth model, the two methodologies are used equally and in parallel to cross-validate and build upon each other's results. (p. 3)

Patton (1990) discussed such a methodological mix which he posited could strengthen a study design by using several types of data, both qualitative and quantitative. Thus, the design of a study may begin with an open, inductive approach and then move to

a more deductive stance toward the emerging data. In like spirit, this study aimed at combining the best elements of quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research questions in the most meaningful and appropriate way.

Study Design

Focus group. The topic for this study arose as the result of a focus group held by the researcher under her capacity as special education instructional supervisor for a medium-sized suburban school district in central Texas. The focus group interview was held to determine needs for staff development for assessment personnel within the school district. According to Morgan (1988), "focus groups are useful either as a self-contained means of collecting data or as a supplement to both quantitative and other qualitative methods" (p. 10). Morgan (1988) commented that focus groups are useful for "orienting oneself to a new field" and for "generating hypotheses based on informants' insights" (p. 11). The specific advantage of using focus groups for the researcher is "the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (p. 12).

Morgan (1988) delineated various strengths and weakness of using focus groups to collect qualitative data. Strengths include the ease with which focus groups can be conducted, their ability to generate hypotheses and explore topics, and "the opportunity to collect data from group interaction" (p. 21). Weaknesses presented include the fact that "focus groups are not based in natural settings" (p. 20); that in comparison with individual interviews, "the researcher has less control over the data that is generated" (p.

21); and that data produced by groups may or may not "mirror individual behavior" (p. 21).

Morgan (1988) posited that "the simplest test of whether focus groups are appropriate for a research project is to ask how actively and easily participants would discuss the topic of interest" (p. 23). In the current use, the focus group was convened as part of a regularly scheduled, daylong meeting of special education assessment personnel. The participants knew each other and had previously worked in group settings to problem-solve or plan department projects and activities. The researcher believed that the participants would actively contribute to the topic chosen since it was a topic with which all were familiar.

Fifteen assessment staff members (educational diagnostician, speech therapists, and licensed specialists in school psychologists) were assembled in a group and given eight to ten 5x8 inch note cards. The researcher used minimal prompts, telling them only to write down anything that came to mind when they thought of transition planning for students with disabilities. No other initial instructions were given. According to Morgan (1988), "low levels of moderator involvement are important for goals that emphasize exploratory research" (p. 49).

After the group members had written as many cards as they could, the researcher read aloud each entry for clarification. The person who wrote the entry or any other group member could offer clarifications if needed. More cards were distributed to those wanting to add comments. The activity produced 106 cards. One card that read "Have a nice day" was discarded. The researcher sorted the 105 cards into the following nine

affinity groups: procedural concerns, age and program levels, parent involvement, agency involvement, community involvement, personnel issues, vocational and transition assessment, need for transition services for students with mild disabilities, and resources available for post-high school.

One of the affinity groups became the basis for the present study. Under the affinity group dealing with the need for transition services for students with mild disabilities, responses suggested respondents differed in their perceptions regarding the level of need for this population. Some believed that all students need transition planning, while others stated that the transition process was not helpful to those students with mild learning problems. The following responses were given in this affinity group:

Why do parents have to be involved at the beginning of transition if no student is headed that way?

Why do we address transition for kids that don't need it?

TRC brochure is insulting to give to mild LD students and parents.

LD students do need transition. They are sometimes overlooked and rushed through in the process.

The TRC is too severe for mild LD students. Parents are offended.

We need to lobby against ITPs for college-bound students who do not really need specialized services.

The suggestion by the focus group that transition planning may not be needed for students with mild disabilities became the initial focus of this study. Because of the difference of opinion regarding the need for transition services expressed by special

education personnel who routinely serve on transition planning teams, the researcher began to question whether transition planning for students with mild disabilities who go to postsecondary institutions is adequate.

Literature review. Based on the initial question as to the adequacy of transition planning for students with disabilities, the researcher undertook a review of related literature. A preliminary review of literature indicated that students with disabilities wishing to enter postsecondary education settings are often afforded inadequate preparation (Dunn, 1996; Fourqurean, Meisgeier, Swank & Williams, 1991; and Seidenberg & Koenigsberg, 1990). Longitudinal studies such as one by Wagner and Blackorby (1996) indicated that students with disabilities who enter college are often not as successful as their peers who have no disabilities. The theories of Argyris and Schön as presented in their work, *Theory in Practice* (1974), were chosen as the theoretical framework of this study. Argyris and Schön's contrast between espoused theories thought to guide behavior versus actual theories-in-action became the basis of comparison regarding transition planning (espoused theories) and actual needs of students with disabilities who enter college (theories-in action).

Based on the review of literature and the results of the focus group, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What transition services are documented on ITPs and IEPs as needed for students with disabilities who exit high school and enter postsecondary programs?

2. What transition services do community colleges recommend for students with disabilities who enter community colleges?
3. What is the relationship between the espoused transition needs of students with disabilities as outlined in their ITPs and IEPs and the actual needs of these students as expressed by community colleges?

Selection of the study site. A community college in a college district of a large metropolitan city in central Texas was chosen as the site of the study. This particular college district has a reputation among area special educators as being open to and inclusive of students with disabilities. Programs to assist students with disabilities have been in existence in this college system for many years. The college district is comprised of four campuses, with plans to start several others in the near future. The particular campus chosen was deemed to be the one with the most eligible students with disabilities accessing support services and accommodations. A meeting between the researcher, her dissertation committee chair, and a dean from the college district was held to discuss the feasibility of conducting the study. The dean expressed the desire of the college system to retain students with disabilities in their programs. The proposed study was viewed as a way to gain helpful information regarding services the college may offer to increase retention rates. The dean assisted the researcher by gaining permission for her to contact one of the coordinators for the Educational Support Center for students with disabilities.

Selection of participants. The subjects of the study were students with disabilities who had entered the selected community college and who had self-declared as having a disability and as needing assistance and accommodations through the college

program for students with disabilities. These students were regarded as having disabilities by virtue of the fact that they had met eligibility requirements as assessed by the college center for learning disabilities. Participants chosen had satisfied the entry requirements of the college and were eighteen years old or older and were therefore considered to be adults.

Pilot testing. Permission to field test proposed data analysis instruments and interview protocols at another community college within the same college district was obtained when permission to do the study at the selected site was given. The researcher tested templates used to analyze college records, an interview content to be used with the college coordinator of the program for students with disabilities, and interview content to be used with college students with disabilities. Revisions needed were made following the pilot test. Testing of the templates to collect data from ITPs and IEPs was conducted by the researcher using files of students enrolled in the special education program which she supervised.

Procedures. Working with the coordinator recommended by the college dean, the researcher devised a plan to access students enrolled in the program for students with disabilities. At the suggestion of the coordinator, permission forms to access college records, to access high school special education records, and to participate in an interview were developed by the researcher and were distributed to the students at the beginning of the college semester. The researcher was available to meet students in the office of the Educational Support Service during the first three days of classes for the semester. As the students came in to pick up letters of accommodation, college personnel introduced the

researcher to the students. Students wishing to participate in the study were given the opportunity to sign the permission form. (See Appendix B.) Confidentiality of the students was maintained until they chose to sign the permission form. Thirty-three students agreed to participate in the study and signed permission for their records to be analyzed.

Once the students agreed to participate in the study, a copy of the release of information form signed by each student was sent to the special education department of the school district from which the student was graduated. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study was sent to each director of special education in order to expedite getting the requested records that consisted of the student's ITPs and IEPs and graduation ARD/IEP. (See Appendix C.) Once these records were obtained, the researcher analyzed the components of the ITPs and IEPs to determine the transition services proposed by the school district. A template devised by the researcher was used to track the presence of the ITP components most commonly recommended in best practice literature on transition planning. (See Appendix D.) The template was devised using model transition elements identified in the literature and from ITP forms gathered from various area school districts. A pilot test conducted to assure that the form was appropriate.

In a similar study of components of IEPs, Grigal, Test, Beattie, and Wood (1997) used the following scale to rate IEP goals: 0 = not present; 1 = minimal; 2 = adequate; and 3 = detailed (p. 360). This rating scale was originally incorporated into the template to use to analyze the transition elements.

For the pilot study for using the template to analyze ITP components, a transition specialist from the local regional educational service center was asked to evaluate ten sample ITPs and rank them using the template and scale. At the suggestion of the transition specialist who felt the fine increments of the scale were difficult to objectively rate, the scale was simplified to: 0 = no evidence of this element in the ITP; and 1 = minimal/adequate evidence in the ITP (the component is mentioned or implied and can be in detailed form).

The researcher accessed the college records of the students and analyzed the type and nature of the programs in which students were enrolled in the community college. A template which had been field-tested at another community college site was used to collect this data. (See Appendix E.)

Each of the students was interviewed to ascertain the types of transition services received while in high school. The students were also asked questions regarding the skills needed to be successful in a community college program and whether they had been adequately prepared for college by their high school special education programs. Each student was asked the same questions. The interviewer used flexibility in probing or exploring topics as they arose. Patton (1990) termed this procedure a combination of "an interview guide approach with a standardized open-ended approach" (p. 287). This technique allows "the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated. . ." (p. 286). The interview format used suggestions outlined by Patton (1990). The interview form (see Appendix F) was field-tested at another community campus site. Using Morgan's (1988) suggestion, various interview questions were developed using

raw data from the respondent cards produced by the focus group described earlier. Students were asked to sign a permission form to allow the interview to be audiotaped. (See Appendix G.)

Interviews were conducted with the four staff members of the community college Educational Support Service Center. Using the same format of a combination of an interview guide and a standardized open-ended interview, the researcher interviewed the Educational Support Service staff members to collect data regarding the actual needs of students with disabilities as they enter community college programs. This interview guide had also been previously field-tested at another community college site with personnel in the Educational Support Service Center. (See Appendix H.) The college staff members were asked to sign a permission form to allow the interview to be audiotaped. (See Appendix G).

Data Analysis

Using methods outlined by Patton (1990), interviews with students and the college administrator were audio-taped. Field notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews. Data from the templates used to analyze the ITP and IEP elements were organized in a matrix format. Frequency counts recording the presence of ITP components were tracked on each of the records of the 15 students. Thus in this study, the presence of transition plan components as recommended in the related literature were counted as they were observed in the written transition plans for the students in the sample. The observed frequencies of the transition components were compared with expected frequencies. The observed frequencies correspond with what Argyris and

Schön would term espoused theories, what the writers of the transition plans believed the students needed. The expected frequencies correspond with what Argyris and Schön would call theories-in-action, what the literature posits as actual needs of the students who enter college settings. The null hypothesis in this study is that there is no difference between the espoused theories of transition needs and the actual theories-in-use.

Responses from the student interviews were also counted regarding the ITP areas the students felt they were well-prepared in and which ITP components they felt they needed for success in college. Responses from the interviews of the college staff were also recorded regarding areas in which students seemed well-prepared and areas in which students with disabilities appear to encounter difficulty when transitioning to a college setting.

Limitations

Patton (1990) insisted that "there are no perfect research designs" (p. 162). In like vein, Maxwell (1996) stated that "there is no 'cookbook' for doing qualitative research" (p. 63). Trade-offs and limitations seem inevitable despite persistent efforts by researchers to increase factors in studies such as internal and external validity and reliability.

This study also has several recognizable limitations. First of all, the focus of this study is not the broad topic of the effectiveness of transition planning. Rather, it focuses on only one aspect of the transition process—transition service needs of students with mild disabilities who enter a community college setting. Second, generalizability is limited to students with disabilities in a limited area of south central Texas. Third, no

faculty members were interviewed to determine if perceptions of the college staff members of the Educational Support Service Center accurately reflected what instructors believe are needed skills and transition services for students with disabilities. Fourth, current success of students (i.e., passing classes) is not taken into account. For example, a student's ITP might be considered inadequate to help prepare him/her for college, yet the student might be doing well. Likewise, an ITP might be considered adequate, yet the student might be failing. Fifth, there are no external validity checks on the perceptions of the experts from literature or the community college staff members on the needs documented on the ITPs. Lastly, no differentiation is made between gender, race or types of disabilities.

There are also limitations inherent in the methodologies chosen. First, Morgan (1988) cautioned that when using focus groups, there is a danger of bias when "all the participants come from one limited source, or major groups are consciously omitted from the data" (p. 45). The focus group from which the initial topic idea was drawn was made up of special education personnel within a single school district. No transition coordinators who are charged with developing ITPs were included in this group.

Another limitation is the respondent group size. While there are no set rules regarding sample size for qualitative studies (Patton, 1990), a larger number of respondents for a quantitative study is usually regarded as adding to external validity and generalizability. However, because both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed on the selected sample, the number of respondents seemed adequate for this study.

An additional limitation is that respondents were recruited from a group that had self-declared as having learning disabilities and had volunteered to be in the study. The resulting sample may not be representative of all of the students with disabilities enrolled in the college. Differences between those students who volunteered to be in the study and those who did not happen to come to the Educational Support Service Center for their accommodations and were therefore not asked to be in the study cannot be determined.

The respondents were chosen without regard to how long it had been from the time that the participant exited high school and the time he/she entered the community college. Likewise, participants differed in the amount of time they had been attending the college. Therefore, there may have been some intervening variables influencing the participants' perceptions of what they needed to be prepared for college and how adequately they felt their high school programs had prepared them.

As a separate issue limiting this study, there was a time span between the data collection and subsequent analysis due to the unexpected deaths of the researcher's husband and son. However, the research questions and the documented challenges that students with disabilities continue to face as they exit high school as reported in the NLTS2 study remain areas of concern in developing effective transition plans. During the intervening time, changes in transition law, such as the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, changed the process and mandates for school districts. For example, Woods, Sylvester, and Martin (2010) explained that IDEA 2004 mandated that school districts use age-appropriate assessments to develop students' postsecondary goals, and "that students with

disabilities be provided a summary of performance (SOP) upon leaving high school" (p.107). Morningstar et al., (2010) commented that under IDEA 2004 "states are now compelled to report student postschool outcome performances…thereby amplifying the importance of tying transition planning and services to student postschool success" (p. 80). Longitudinal studies such as NLTS2 will continue to track how these changes positively impact student success. Nevertheless, students with disabilities continue to appear to lag behind their peers as they transition to postschool activities. Findings and recommendations developed from this study are still relevant and useful to professionals charged with developing effective transition plans.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

The study was conducted at a community college in a college district of a major metropolitan city in central Texas. Subjects in this study were community college students who came to the learning disability center and voluntarily gave consent to participate. Subjects had self-declared to the college as having a learning disability and needing accommodations through the college program for disabilities. Participants gave written consent for their high school special education records to be obtained and analyzed by the researcher for purposes of this study. The consent for release of records forms were sent to the Department of Special Education in each of the subjects' school districts. A cover letter explaining the study was attached to each consent form for release of records. In some cases when records were not received from the school district, a personal call was made to the Director of Special Education to seek assistance in procuring the records. After the subjects' public school records were received by the researcher, the transition plans were reviewed and analyzed.

Subjects were interviewed regarding their recollections of conferences held in their high schools during which plans were developed to assist the students transitioning from high school to post high school. Students were interviewed relative to components of their transition plans they believed supportive or related to college progress and experiences. Additionally, personnel from the college's Education Support Services

center were interviewed to ascertain which elements of student transition plans were necessary for students to succeed in college.

History of the Community College

The community college was founded as an industrial school for girls in 1898. Over the next fifty-two years it developed from an industrial school to a fully-accredited community college. During part of its history the college became a junior college serving the black community of the city. In 1945, it became part of the junior college district which, in 1982, had its name changed to community college district. Part of the mission of the college "is to provide a quality educational environment which stimulates leadership, personal growth, and a lifelong appreciation for learning" (St. Philip's College Catalog, 1998, p. 13). Another element in the mission of the college is to provide "services and appropriate accommodations for special needs individuals" (p. 14).

Characteristics of the college population. According to St. Philip's College Quick Facts (1998), total student enrollment for the fall 1997 semester was 8,260 students, including both part-time and full-time enrollees. Student data indicated 45% were males, 55% female, 20% black, 29% white, 48% Hispanic, and 3% other (pp. 1-2). Under the category "Special Populations" 4% were listed as "academically disadvantaged" and 5% "physically disabled" (p. 2). Students ranged in age from 18 or less to over 50 years old, with the mean age being 28.5 (p. 3). Table 4.1 presents demographics of the college's population.

Table 4.1
Study School Selected Demographics

Students	N	%
Total	8,260	100
Gender		
Male	3,747	45
Female	4,513	55
Ethnicity		
Black	1,668	20
White	2,418	29
Hispanic	3,970	48
Other	204	3
Special Populations		
Academically Disadvantaged	420	4
Physically Disabled	424	5
Age		
18-26	4456	54
27-39	2469	30
40 and Above	1335	16

Selection of Participants

Subjects for the study were chosen as the students came to the learning disabilities center to procure their class accommodations for the beginning of the semester. Students came to the center singly or in small groups of two or three at a time. The researcher greeted each student after he or she had signed in to see the learning disability counselor. Over a period of several days for several hours each day, the researcher met with the students as they entered the learning center and explained to them the purpose of the study involving transition plans completed for them by school staff from the high school from which they had graduated. All students who happened to come to the learning center while the researcher was present were asked to be part of the study. The subjects of the study were obtained based on the chance meeting with the

researcher during her attendance in the learning center during the time period students had to pick up their accommodations.

Almost all students who were asked to participate signed permission forms and scheduled interviews with the researcher. A total of 33 students consented to be part of the study. Records from their high schools were requested. Of the 33 initially contacted, records for 11 of the students were either not available from the school district or the records received included no individual transition plan. One school reported that records were no longer accessible. One of these students lived outside the state when he graduated. His records were not made available by his school. One of the students was not identified as having a learning disability until he was tested at the college learning center. Therefore, he had no records at his high school regarding a learning disability. Records of six students were received but when the researcher tried to contact them for an interview, the phone numbers given on the consent form were not valid. Letters using the students' addresses from college records were sent to request that these students contact the researcher. No responses were received. In all, 15 out of the 33 consenting students had valid records and participated in interviews with the researcher.

Student profiles. The following table provides a picture of the participants based on gender, ethnicity and age.

Table 4.2
Student Demographics

Students	N	%
Total	15	100
Gender		
Male	9	60
Female	6	40
Ethnicity		
Black	3	20
White	4	33
Hispanic	7	46
Other	1	1
Age		
18-26	15	100
27-39	0	0
40 and Above	0	0

Comparison with total college enrollment. When comparing the demographics of the study participants with the total college population, differences were noted. Males in the study were represented in greater numbers than males in the college. African Americans who participated in the study were represented at a percentage equal to those in the total college population. Slightly more Caucasians participated in the study and fewer Hispanics participated than the percentages found in the college at large. One Asian American was included in the study. Ages of the subjects ranged from 19 to 24 years old. The mean age of students at the college was 28.5; the mean age in the study was 20.4, with 20 years old being the median age and the mode. Of the 11 students whose complete records were not received, 6 students were over the mean age. It appeared that the longer it had been since the student graduated from high school, the less

likely it was for acceptable records to be received. Table 4.3 gives a description of the fifteen students included in the study.

Table 4.3
Characteristics of Subjects

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Disability	High School Setting
C. B.	23	Caucasian	Female	LD	Rural
C. B.	20	African-American	Male	LD	Suburban
A. C.	24	Hispanic	Male	LD	Suburban
J. D.	19	Caucasian	Male	OHI, LD	Suburban
R. D.	20	Caucasian	Female	OHI, LD	Urban
S. G.	19	Hispanic	Female	LD	Urban
R. G.	22	Hispanic	Male	LD	Rural
V. M.	20	Hispanic	Female	OHI	Urban
E. M.	21	Hispanic	Male	OHI, LD	Urban
R. M.	20	Hispanic	Male	LD	Urban
J. M.	20	African-American	Female	OHI	Urban
F. P.	20	African-American	Male	ED	Urban
N. R.	19	Asian-American	Male	ED, LD	Urban
J. U.	19	Caucasian	Female	LD	Urban
N. V.	20	Hispanic	Male	ED	Urban

Demographics of the Educational Support Services Personnel

Four staff members of the learning disabilities center of the college were interviewed, three men and one woman. The female was Director of the Educational Support Services. The three men were listed in the college catalog as Learning Disabilities Specialist; Interpreter Services Manager; and Manager, Academic Support Services. One man worked primarily with students with physical disabilities such as deafness or blindness. All had advanced graduate degrees.

Frequency Results of the ITP Components

Records from the subjects' high schools were requested and the Individual Transition Plans (ITPs) were analyzed to determine the presence of the twelve ITP components found in the literature review of suggested practices for developing ITPs (Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002; Cobb, 2007; Dolber, 1996; Levinson, 1998; Miller, Lombard & Corbey, 2007; Price, 2002; Stodden & Whelley, 2004; Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Eddy, 2005; Webster & Queen, 2008; and Wehmeyer, 2007). A template of the twelve components was constructed to rate each item as "no evidence found" or "minimal/adequate evidence found", as none of the ITPs showed significant inclusion of the 12 components. Each student's high school records were examined to find the final ITP written for each student prior to graduation. Using the template, the researcher scrutinized each ITP to find the presence of the twelve recommended ITP components. If a component was not found on the ITP, the item was scored as "no evidence found." If the item was found on the ITP, it was scored as "minimal/adequate evidence found." The following table indicates the frequency rates that the identified components were found in each student's ITP written prior to graduation.

Table 4.4
Frequency of ITP Components

ITP Component	Frequency		Percent	
	No Evidence	Minimum Evidence	No Evidence	Minimum Evidence
Self-advocacy	8	7	53.3	46.7
Postsecondary options	2	13	13.3	86.7
Study skills	15	0	100	0
Disability awareness	15	0	100	0
Academic skills	14	1	93.3	6.7
Mainstreaming	5	10	33.3	66.7
Social skills	5	10	33.3	66.7
Agency collaboration	2	13	13.3	86.7
Accommodations	13	2	86.7	13.3
Student participation	2	13	13.3	86.7
Parent participation	3	12	20	80
Financial assistance	15	0	100	0

Three of the 12 recommended ITP components were not found in any of the ITPs of the students: study skills/organization skills/time management; self-understanding/disability awareness; and financial assistance. Components shown as having low frequency of occurrence were academic skills and knowledge of accommodations needed/available. Components which appeared in the ITPs most frequently were self-advocacy/self determination; knowledge of postsecondary options/community resources; college preparatory/mainstreaming/inclusion; social skills/self-esteem; interagency collaboration; participation in transition planning by the student; and participation in transition planning by parent/family.

Components of ITPs Remembered by the Students

During the personal interviews, students were asked if they remembered talking about the 12 ITP components during their transition planning sessions in their high schools. Table 4.5 shows a comparison of the 12 ITP components that were documented

on the ITPs versus those that the students recalled as being discussed during their ITP meetings.

Table 4.5

Comparison of Documented ITP Components v. Components Students Recalled Being Discussed

ITP Components	% Documented	% Recalled
Self-advocacy	46.7	53.3
Postsecondary options	86.7	60
Study skills	0	66.7
Disability awareness	0	53.3
Academic skills	6.7	73
Mainstreaming	66.7	73.3
Social skills	60	33.3
Agency collaboration	86.6	46.7
Accommodations	13.3	73.3
Student participation	86.6	66
Parent participation	80	80
Financial assistance	0	60

ITP items which were included in the ITPs and which were remembered by the students were self-advocacy, postsecondary options, mainstreaming/inclusion, student participation in the meeting, and parent participation in the meeting. ITP items which were not included on the ITP or were found at a low level of incidence but were recalled at a 50% or greater level by the student as being discussed included study skills, disability awareness, academic competencies, knowledge of accommodations needed, and facts regarding financial assistance. ITP components that occurred at a 60% or greater level but which were not recalled by the students were social skills and interagency collaboration.

There are several possible explanations for the discrepancies between documented ITP components and those remembered by the students. ITP meetings may have proceeded ARD meetings during which some of these topics could also have been discussed. Students also may have tended to overlook or forget items which at the time did not seem relevant to them. For example, most students felt they did not need help with social skills. Social skills were identified on 67% of the ITPs but only 33% of the students recalled discussing this component.

ITP Components that Students Believe are Needed for College Success

Students were asked to consider which of the 12 ITP components they believed were necessary for success since beginning their studies in college. Table 4.6 shows a comparison of the ITP components observed on the ITPs versus those the students believed were needed for success in college since beginning their programs of study.

Table 4.6
Observed ITP Components v. Components Students Believed Necessary for College Success

ITP Components	% Documented	% Needed
Self-advocacy	46.7	86.7
Postsecondary options	86.7	100
Study skills	0	93.3
Disability awareness	0	93.3
Academic skills	6.7	93.3
Mainstreaming	66.7	93.3
Social skills	60	46.7
Agency collaboration	86.6	80.0
Accommodations	13.3	100
Student participation	86.6	93.3
Parent participation	80	93.3
Financial assistance	0	93.3

Components which were frequently found on the ITPs and which students agreed were highly necessary to success were postsecondary options, mainstreaming/inclusion, interagency collaboration, student participation in planning sessions, and parent participation in planning meetings. Significantly, there were several components which did not occur frequently on the ITPs but that students felt were needed. These included self-advocacy, study skills, disability awareness, academic competencies, necessary accommodations, and financial assistance. One item, social skills, was found on 66% of the ITPS reviewed. However, only 33% of students recalled discussing the issue and 53% of students felt the component was not needed by them for college success.

Patterns Arising from the Interviews of Students

Each student was interviewed regarding plans made in high school for the transition to college. Some of the questions asked were open-ended. An analysis of responses indicated critical areas students believed were important to a successful college experience.

What was your role in the ITP planning sessions? Responses to this question can be broken down into passive and active participation. Out of the 15 students queried, 9 indicated a passive role in the planning process. Four students could not remember attending the ITP sessions and had no comments about their roles. Four of the students attended the meetings but did not feel they had an active role in the planning. The following comments were made by these four students.

They called me into the meetings sometimes. My parents helped.

I went and they asked questions. I don't think I had a role. Everyone

was trying to plan for me.

They asked questions like would I go to college. Yes. What will I do?

I didn't know until I went to college.

I just sat there. My parents and advisors were talking. I told them the courses I wanted to take and which were hard for me. I didn't want to take Spanish. The ARD set 50 as passing.

One of the students did not attend the meeting but had some cogent comments:

I did not attend. I am bi-polar and ADHD. It was a school decision for me not to attend. No one talked to me about college. They thought of me as a lost cause.

Six of the students seemed to take an active role in the planning sessions as indicated by the following responses:

My parents were there and some of the teachers to go over my progress in class and what I needed to do to better help me. I asked the teachers questions but my mom did all the talking.

I told them what I wanted to do in school for my future. I was equal with everyone else. I wanted to get modifications I needed.

I went to the meetings each year to decide what classes to take. It was a mutual decision. I had a say so. My role was deciding my own future.

I picked the courses to take. You need certain courses. I listened to everyone at high school to know what to take.

They asked me what I wanted to do besides sports. I told them what I like to do. My role was presenting what I wanted to do.

They were telling me what to expect. My responsibility is to put forth effort. I was trying to better myself—find info on how the process worked. I asked questions.

Now that you have enrolled in and attended a community college, what needs do you feel you must have in order to be successful? All of the students had thoughts on what they needed for success. Six of the students reported on outside services or modifications needed to pass courses:

I had a note taker. I kicked and screamed for one-on-one attention or someone to look out for my needs—an advocate.

I am doing well. Lab and tutoring are helpful.

I need a reader and to know where to go to get help such as getting paperwork set up.

Resources for learning disabilities—places for help.

I get a note taker every semester.

To pass math—that's what I need.

Nine of the remaining students reflected on personal attributes or specific actions they needed to do to be successful.

Have faith in yourself and be patient.

Be organized. You need time warnings to have time for everything. You have to remember stuff and pay attention real good.

Study. There is a lot of book reading.

When I go to classes I am by myself. That's how I accomplish things. I like to read by myself. I ask for help if I don't know a word.

I need to show up to all classes. It's all on me to pass or fail.

Pay attention and keep focused on work. I never thought I'd be in college. Then I was in!

I'm doing well so far, doing my work. I ask my professor my questions. I have him available.

I need enough time to study and to go to class everyday.

Understanding. I'm a believer in having to talk to your professors. You have to even if it is not easy. That is your survival. Also you need someone you feel comfortable with to guide you in the right direction. That makes college easier to get though.

What programs, courses, people or events helped you the most in your preparation for college? Seven of the respondents cited their parents or other close family members as being the most helpful to them:

My mom and dad. They helped me out—filled out stuff, read to me, and helped with math homework.

My high school counselor and parents.

Parent and principal.

Parents help figure out what is best for you.

Family and fiancée.

Mom helped the most. She helped me keep up with reading.

Mom.

The second most mentioned source of help preparing for college were various school personnel including teachers of elective subjects and sponsors of extracurricular programs:

My cross-country coach in middle school and the LD teacher in high school.

At the end of my senior year I took tests to determine my interests. The senior teachers knew me and told me what they thought and where I should go. I liked one counselor better and got her opinion.

My work co-op teacher and regular education class teachers.

In high school my counselor helped me, especially the Special Needs counselor.

The Texas Rehabilitation counselor helped me get into college and get financial assistance.

What helped me was Student Council, Marching Band, Health Occupations Club, Computer Club Science Club, my senior history teacher, and the reading and math teachers.

Four of the students related that they did not get much help from their high schools as they prepared for college. Some felt they had to do everything on their own:

Myself. I knew I had to get a 2-year degree and I needed a car dealership to sponsor me. I got that and the dealership kept me on the job. The automotive teacher in college and the advisor who helped me register also helped.

It was mainly my part—a little of everything. After high school I spent a year doing different things like working at Just for Feet. Then my younger cousin started college and I wanted to go, too.

I didn't have a good counselor in high school. I wasn't told about college night. Nothing helped me in high school except I took college prep courses. I got more help in college from the Educational Support Services. My high school didn't really help me that much.

How did you select your college? Who helped you? Ten of the subjects said that family or friends helped them pick their college.

My mom and my cousin helped me choose.

A lady from my church works at the college and she talked to me about it.

My dad decided. He said this college was closer to home and had more parking than the other community college.

My mom helped me decide. I thought it would be good and wasn't that far away. I told my dad I wanted to go to another college but he said this one is closer. My advisor said it was a good school.

My mom and dad wanted me to go closer to home. The college sent me a pamphlet and I picked out what to major in. They have a good medical field program.

My dad brought home books from both community colleges. This one was closer to where I live. The other school is farther and has more people.

My parents helped me. I got a catalog from the college. My aunt is a principal and she old me about the learning center. I learned about it by word of mouth.

My cousin went here. I heard good things about it. I had relatives that went here.

Two students cited getting help through interagency collaboration.

The TRC (Texas Rehabilitation Commission) counselor helped me and it was close by.

TRC paid for me to go to another college in Bee County. Then they let me go here.

Three students maintained that they chose the college themselves, partly because of special characteristics of the college.

This one accepted a special education diploma. I picked it because it is a small one. I knew I couldn't go to a big school.

I picked it myself after a teacher told me about it. It is the only college in the city to offer an automotive technician program.

No one helped me. It was pretty obvious. I looked at the brochures and was looking for a radiology program.

What did your family do to help you get into college? Only one of the fifteen students surveyed contended that his family did "nothing. I did it all." The majority of the subjects reported various types of support including financial assistance, emotional encouragement, and taking necessary actions regarding enrollment. Family help for the students included:

Let me have a car to go to school.

Gave me support and help paying for it.

My family was supportive, picked me up from school, and helped with homework.

Gave me support. They told me I could do it.

Mom checked out places and narrowed it to junior college. It is harder being thrown into a 4-year school.

They helped me financially, emotionally, and explained a college degree.

They talked me into it and paid for everything.

We went to the director of the learning center. He talked to my dad about financial aid.

They took me up there, showed me the ropes, paid tuition, and gave me money for books

The helped me pay for it, fill out the application, see the counselor, and helped pick my classes.

They encouraged me and helped financially.

We went to see a relative that works at the college. We talked to her and she sent me to the financial aid counselor.

What courses did you take in high school that helped you prepare for the courses you have taken or are currently taking in college? Two respondents replied that there were no courses they took that helped prepare them. The two responded as follows:

None.

None. I was passing classes just to get out. They didn't have sociology or law enforcement classes. I didn't really know in high school what I wanted to do.

All other students cited various academic classes, but many also included elective courses or extracurricular programs. Courses which offered hands-on training seemed particularly helpful. Several students named helpful courses but then qualified that by saying their high schools did not offer the types of courses they were now taking, i.e., sociology and psychology. The following comments were made by the students:

I took Culinary Arts in high school like I am taking here. Sports taught me to be social and motivated, to better myself.

Debate class helped.

High school and college are nothing alike. I learned more here in college. I did take Child Care in high school and worked at a daycare for school credit. I am studying to be a kindergarten or pre-k teacher.

Algebra, geometry and English.

There were no business courses I took in high school. I took keyboarding, math and English. I was in a work program where you go to school half a day and then go to work. I worked at two nursing homes. I told my dad the work program helped me and made me want to help people.

I took math, English, reading and health. I didn't take any vocational classes.

Not really. Math. I didn't have sociology in high school. Science

helped. My 10th grade science teacher as great. How he taught the class prepped me for college. I took child development courses in high school. My school didn't have sociology or psychology. The computer classes helped.

I took child development courses and was an elementary education helper doing bulletin boards.

In history class the teacher taught us to outline. That has helped me study. I took the required computer course but it didn't help much. I took it again in college. It gets outdated. The college course helped me more.

Automotive class, four years of math and high school English.

Reading improvement, English, Health Occupations, math, Student Council, history, biology, science classes, marching band—it helped with social skills—and Science Club.

I took high school business classes but that isn't what I'm doing. I want to go into child care. I did take Child Development and Parenting and home economics in high school.

I'm studying radiology. During the summer I volunteered at a hospital. This helped me the most. I took science courses, biology, chemistry and math.

Additional Topics Students Reported

The final open-ended question of the interview asked the students to comment on any topic regarding transition from high school to college that they felt strongly about

which we had not yet discussed. Four respondents replied that the interview "had covered it." It was during this part of the interview in which the students became the most animated and passionate in giving their opinions. One young woman shook her finger at the interviewer and told her to "go back and tell special ed people what we need." Her comments and those of other students follow:

> *Special ed has changed since I was in high school. Special ed wants people to graduate. I only had to make a 50 not a 70 to pass. This hindered me when I got to college. It was so much harder. High school didn't make me accountable. You do need modifications but not heavy-handed at lower expectations on grades. I didn't mind it then but when I got to college it was hard.*
>
> *Trying to find out about college, knowing people in college, how to get help, and trying to get noticed.*
>
> *The counseling center here is very good. They are always there to answer questions.*
>
> *College was a different experience. You saw older people-40 to 60-year olds, a different generation. You can learn from them. Everyone is there to better themselves. If students want it bad enough, go over every barrier to get it. You got to love your career. Don't get a job you don't want to do.*
>
> *If you want to get help you have to be determined and do it yourself. No one in high school pushed me. I got more support here at college. I spent the first year in remedial classes. I passed TASP except in math. Coming this fall I will be in*

some regular classes. I am still not sure if I want to go into the field of computers.

I got more help once I got to college. I wish I had been told "better prep work." That is what teachers and counselors should do. My mom did all of this. My counselor didn't. My best friend is a nurse and she didn't get help either. My high school is more concerned with the top 20%. I was in the middle. The second half are on their own. I don't recommend my high school for nobody. My mom didn't like what the counselor told me—that I would never make it in college. We went to the college learning center and my life changed. The person there said the counselor was wrong. I'm a sophomore now and plan to transfer to OLLU in the fall next year. Another bad thing: They only make you take two years of math in high school and not the upper levels. Then you get to college and it is hard. They expect you to know it. Make sure you excel and take higher courses as a senior. If not, you are stuck. You can't pass TASP and you can't get your degree. You have to keep taking classes to pass TASP. I recommend tutoring so you can pass. Get it early.

Math is a hard thing. I get help from the learning center and I ask friends to help me with Algebra.

My high school didn't help me enough. I took some courses in re-hab. I didn't have to do that much work. They gave me the answers to pass and get out. They need to prepare high school students more. Your senior year should be like college. They should tell you once, not baby you.

Maybe my counselor needed to do more, fulfill her role, and communicate with me.

Be aware what's out there to better yourself. I didn't have people sitting me down to tell me what to do. If I knew what I know now, I would have gone to college sooner and maybe not be in the army now. High schools don't tell kids except the best students and the athletes. They should have motivated everyone.

Interviews with College Staff of the Educational Support Services

Interviews of college staff members were coordinated with the director of Educational Support Services. The director and three of her staff were questioned regarding their opinions on how well incoming students had been prepared for college by their high schools. Interviewees were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "Most incoming freshman with disabilities have received adequate preparation by their secondary schools in order to be successful in college." Respondents were given the choice of "strongly agree, agree, disagree and not sure". All four responded with the choice "disagree". The college staff's assessment of the needs of incoming students will be addressed by reporting their responses to nine interview prompts.

Describe the transition needs of incoming freshmen with disabilities. Only one of the college faculty reported no discernible difference between students with disabilities and those without.

Students with disabilities need the same skills as any coming into college—long term goals and counseling in short term goals to accomplish that goal. There isn't a big difference in those with disabilities.

The other three members reported specific needs.

> *There are two different populations. For the older population, they weren't identified as learning disabled until they got here. They have been in the workforce and have good social skills. They seem to be more independent. For younger students, there are glaring needs. They are used to certain accommodations which the school provided. In college they have to do this for themselves. We tell them the process to get accommodations and then they are on their own. Also, generally they haven't had practice on standardized tests. They are clobbered by placement tests and may go to remedial classes. The best transition seems to be for those with physical disabilities and the worse transition is for the deaf. They are usually functioning at a third or fourth grade level academically, have poor language skills. ED students don't have many transition problems unless they have big secondary learning disability problems. We don't have a problem with them and may only have to chat with them once a year. One was an honor roll student. We see that a lot. Our transition problem is LD kids. LD kids lack self-advocacy, don't understand why they aren't exempt from stuff like in high school, and aren't used to a level of personal accountability. They aren't coddled period. This is a shock. They lack study skills. They are low in note-taking and test-taking skills. They know how to be in class on time but don't know you have to turn in quality work on time. They have no schema for study skills required and what their role in college is. They act more like little kids than other disability groups. They are more dependent.*

This answer has two parts. First, they need more knowledge about their own disabilities, their strengths and weakness, and what accommodations they need. Second, it would benefit them to have stronger college prep in reading, language and math, but this is dependent on their disability.

They need to be able to understand what expectations of teachers are. I teach study skills. They need to keep track of things on their own. A lot of students who are not disabled have trouble with this without being reminded. There should be higher expectations from high school. The "gap" is bigger for the disabled. Maybe they don't work that hard in high school.

What past training and experiences have you noticed in the most successful students with disabilities? Respondents generally cited academic competencies as well as personal skills such as self-advocacy and good decision-making.

Typically, successful students are more knowledgeable about their disability and what works for them. They are good self-advocates. They are more willing to see me or an instructor if they need help. They also have the strongest academic preparation, as much math and English as they can. If they need resource class in high school, they should also take the subject in a regular class so they can learn what is required here.

Successful students usually have when they come in is to know how to make a decision for themselves. I can always tell when a deaf student has had to make decisions for themselves, not just mimicking what parents say. Another important skill for the deaf is literacy, reading and writing English. Some come in with

third or fourth grade literacy skills. Expectations in high school need to go up. They need critical thinking skills.

Successful students recognize upfront they will be challenged more than non-disabled. They realize it isn't going to be easy. They will have to work, not coast through a two-year program. Students prepared by having a solid high school program will be successful.

Older students have worked fulltime and have a better handle on the real world. For younger students who succeed, they have part-time jobs, have taken standardized test on a regular basis, and were held to a high academic standard in high school.

What factors seem to influence lack of success in the postsecondary educational setting? Respondents cited hindrances such as poor academic preparedness, lack of motivation, and not taking advantage of assistance from the Educational Support Service.

One factor is low expectation, which is common in inner city schools, especially with the disabled. They aren't getting the content. They are getting a watered down curriculum. They should still know the same amount of stuff. They have lack of experience in taking standardized test or a variety of test types such as true/false, multiple choice with several legitimate answers, essay exams, term papers, and oral presentations. They need to advocate for themselves.

Some factors are lack of preparedness, lack of motivation and confusion about future goals. A few students think if they pay their money, they are good to go.

Not even attendance is important. If they perceive college as a fulltime job, they are more likely to be successful. But we have successful ones who might have jobs and families. One worked 12 hours at HEB and had to ride the bus.

In my experience one factor is students having problems solved for them. They have no experience solving their own problems. They may not have a lot of communication with their families. They are also lacking basic skills. This contributes to a lack of motivation. They have lackadaisical attitudes and wait for things to happen.

One thing is not working through disabled student services, trying to do it on their own. I eventually see some students after one or two years and they aren't near getting a degree. They may have 100 hours credit. When financial assistance is cut off, then they look for help. Another hindering factor is not following through on our recommendations such as tutoring and other support services. Next, they enroll in too many courses. They want to be fulltime and that is too much. They can register without advisement.

Do you agree that most incoming freshmen with disabilities have received adequate preparation by their secondary schools in order to be successful in college? As noted above, all four college faculty members disagreed with this statement. In voicing their disagreement they reported problems for students including need for remediation, lack of student participation in planning for college, and poor attendance in high school.

The overall big-picture problem is in the laws. The high school is required to take care of everything for the students. Students may take a backseat in the whole ITP process and don't have a taste of reality until they get here. The support folks aren't around to help them. The sheer numbers at high school are a problem. Transition folks do the best they can. Laws here in college are different. During the student's first semester I mainly deal with the parents because they don't trust their child. There is a big weaning off period, like dropping off a cliff.

In general, I disagree. With my deaf students I strongly disagree. LD is better understood by high schools. LD students know more what to do but are still not adequately prepared because of literacy and communication gaps.

Many students aren't able to attend frequently enough to be adequately prepared. I was in an ARD where the student was unable to attend because of her disability. One bright girl fell behind because she couldn't attend regularly because of her disability.

Most need a lot of remediation. All but the physically impaired come in years below grade level. This is a disservice. They don't have a schema for college—what college is all about. TRC tells them what to be without asking the students what they want. The agency may not look at the IQ or at strengths and weaknesses. Generally, the disabled don't know what occupations are out there. You can take a one-year program and then make $60,000 a year. When we visit high schools we ask them what jobs they know. A plumber can make $150 an

hour. There is a lack of vocational knowledge given to them. We can work on that when they get here but it would help to be told in the 6th grade, you have to take TASP, etc. Disabled students haven't been treated like an Honors AP English student whose teachers prepare kids for college courses. The disabled don't get this. They don't know how to register, get financial aid, or buy books. High school counselors don't want to deal with the disabled. If they are lucky they have a good VAC or resource teacher. They need to know the details of college.

Level of observed preparedness. College staff members were asked to rate the level of preparation of incoming students in ten of the twelve areas considered to be best practice for developing ITPs. The components of student participation at the transition planning meeting and parent participation at the meeting were not included in the areas the staff was asked to rate. Choices for the perceived level of preparation exhibited by the student subjects were "none, minimal, adequate, or don't know".

Areas in which at least 50% the college staff felt the students were adequately prepared were disability awareness, mainstreaming/inclusion, and social skills. Areas in which at least 50% of the college staff felt the students had only minimal preparedness were self-advocacy, postsecondary options, study skills, academic skills, agency collaboration, accommodations, and financial assistance. One out of the four staff members reported no sign of preparedness in the areas of postsecondary options, study skills, agency collaboration, and financial assistance. One or two of the college staff reported they did not know the status of the students' preparedness in the areas of

academic skills, mainstreaming/inclusion, and social skills. In the personal interviews each of the college staff members had definite views on the need for students to have adequate skills in academics and social skills despite reporting they did not know the status of the students' preparedness in these areas.

Are there other areas in which students should be given preparation for college while they are in high school? This was an open-ended question to elicit areas of college preparedness not already covered by the twelve recommended ITP components. One respondent said the original twelve components were a "pretty comprehensive list". The other three respondents cited areas such as early planning, academic competence, and more information on careers that are available.

> *Prepare for college starting in junior high—7th, 8th, and 9th grade.*
>
> *One big thing is literacy. It is a big crisis for the deaf, maybe not so much for all disabilities. They need to be transitioned with college skills. For example, their last two years in high school, give them a syllabus to depend on and plan from. They don't know how to write research papers and don't have confidence writing long pieces of writing. I asked them to write five pages and they wrote three. They need to transition into college expectations the closer they are to finishing high school.*
>
> *Students need better career info and not so skewed toward a 4-year college. Let them know in 6th grade what academic expectations are.*

Should students with only mild disabilities be given transition services in high school to prepare them for college? This interview question was formulated to

answer several questions posed by the focus group of school professionals described in Chapter III, some of whom did not think students who are mildly disabled and who are planning on going to college need transition services. Most of the college staff members stated that transition planning is needed by all students, even those with only mild disabilities.

> *Yes, even mild disabilities can have an impact in college. There is a risk for mild disabilities to be overlooked. The transition to college is hard even for those with mild disabilities. Anything you can do to enhance their success is important.*
>
> *Certainly all students should be given transition services. It probably needs to start in the 8th grade and to cover what college could do for them. Give transition services to all students. I wish my child had this. Students are not given enough information. Ninety percent of our students don't have a good concept of what is out there after high school.*

One college counselor differed in his opinion on preparing students with mild disabilities for college. He emphasized more education in vocations for those not going to college.

> *No, when I think of transition it always means going to work, preparing you to do something after high school. High school prepares you for college and that may not be what they can do. If we feel they can't do college they need to look at other alternatives. Beginning at age 14, everyone should have a clear idea where they are going.*

Should only students with severe disabilities be given transition services in high school? College personnel reported that it is critical for all students with disabilities, whether mild or severe, to receive transition planning for college.

> *I don't look at the student as being disabled first. I look at what the student's desires are and then how to accommodate their needs. Transition planning is even more important for those with severe disabilities. Sometimes support can be offered at high school that can't be offered at college. An example is assistance in going to the bathroom. They need assistance finding their classes. This is even more important for those with severe disabilities. Someone may have to fill in that gap. Both need transition services. It should be individualized. Someone with a low-average IQ and poor reading skills may be a good candidate for a certificate program. Transition coordinators need to be knowledgeable about community college or invite college staff to ARD meetings. Junior and senior years may be too late. It may need to happen in 9th grade. For one high school I suggested a plan for testing all 9th graders to see what remediation they need. The students would also be tested in the last half of their sophomore year. Results would be a yardstick to see what remediation would be needed if they came into a community college that day. College staff needs to work closer with transition coordinators for students at earlier ages.*

What is the most troublesome/difficult issue you face with students with disabilities who come to college? Answers to this prompt appeared to be influenced by the area of expertise of each staff member. Two counselors worked primarily with students with learning disabilities and two worked with students with physical problems, including deafness and blindness.

I work with physical disabilities. It is usually the physical plant I have to deal with to make it work for the student. For example, an elevator was broken for three days. I had to make a plan to move the class of 35 to another building which had a working elevator. I admire students who are challenged more. They are highly motivated individuals. In hospitals they use universal precautions. They used to put signs on specific room doors. Now everyone uses precautions for everyone. In doing this kind of business, I don't look at disability. I see a student who wants to be successful. How can I help him? We use universal precautions and are fully covered under ADA and we meet their needs. Most students get hands-on service because of the small size of the college.

The number one issue for the deaf is literacy. This may not apply to those who are blind or have orthopedic problems. For all disability types there is a passivity problem. They are lead to believe things will be done for them.

One of the most troublesome problems is students bite off more than they can chew. They want to be fulltime students. TRC wants them to be

fulltime. I can tell they won't be successful the first time out. They may end up not passing anything. A second problem is when I have to work with students who just aren't college material. I would rather them work on independent living skills and social skills. They can't succeed. Usually these students have low or borderline IQs. Even certificate programs are too much. Some even fail PE because they fail the exam. We could say they could have an oral exam but at the same level as everyone else. Even in remedial courses, they need a 75 to pass. After two semesters of failing they are put on scholastic probation and are then monitored for one more semester. If their GPA falls below 2.0, they are withdrawn and must sit out a semester. They get $1500 a semester in financial aid which they lose.

It varies. Some students who get all As in self-contained classes in high school don't understand why they are in remedial classes for students at a fifth grade or lower academic level. They don't understand they got a watered-down curriculum in high school. For the deaf, they were treated as childlike with no regard for their emerging adulthood. The same is true for the LD student in the area of low academic preparation. The most overriding issue is low academic self-esteem because they have been told they are stupid and don't belong in college. It takes many semesters to overcome. College is an incredibly appropriate placement for most disabled students. It should be the expectation as though there

wasn't a disability, except for those who are mentally retarded or very physically disabled.

Conclusion

Analysis of the 12 ITP components, interviews of the students in the study, and interviews of the college learning center staff yields recurring themes which may inform current practices in writing transition plans for students with disabilities who wish to enter a community college program.

ITP components. All of the 12 recommended components found in ITP literature were not found in the students' ITPs at a minimal range of occurrence and adequacy. Components found in less than 13.3% of the samples include study skills, disability awareness, financial assistance, academic skills, and accommodations needed. The omission of these components is surprising considering the frequency with which they were identified as necessary for transition planning by both the students and college staff members. The following components were found at a 50% or greater level of occurrence: self-advocacy, postsecondary options, mainstreaming/inclusion, social skills, interagency collaboration (most commonly TRC), student participation in the ITP development and parent participation in the process.

Students were asked which of the 12 components they recalled as being part of the ITP developments. Students at times recalled discussing items that, in fact, were not included in the ITPs. This finding raises a series of questions regarding student presence and participation in public school transition planning. Some items covered adequately on the ITPs were not recalled. The students particularly tended to not mention some items

that the students later claimed were not needed for college success. For example, most students did not report social skills as being necessary for success. While 67% of the ITPs analyzed documented the need for social skills training, only 33% of the students remembered discussing it.

Students were then asked which of the suggested ITP components seemed to be necessary for college success now that they had some experience moving from secondary school to college. Areas in which ITPs included components at a lower percentage rate of occurrence than the students reported as being necessary for college success include self-advocacy, postsecondary options, study skills, disability awareness, academic skills, mainstreaming/inclusion, accommodations needed, student participation in ITP development, parent participation in planning, and financial assistance. Differences in the frequency of components that students believed were important and the frequency of these components being recorded on the ITP raise questions concerning the validity of the ITP process in public schools. Students' ranking of the need for the various ITP components more closely reflected the recommendations of transition literature for ITP development than did the actual observed frequencies of these components in the students' ITPs. For example, three of the twelve suggested ITP components were not found on any of the ITPs that were analyzed: study skills, disability awareness, and financial assistance. Over ninety percent of the students stated that these three elements were needed for success in college. Likewise, the components of academic skills and knowledge of accommodations needed were found on only a few ITPs, but over ninety percent of the students rated each of these as being necessary for success in college.

Only one item the literature commended as important, social skills, was not seen as being important for college success by approximately half of the students.

Student interviews. Several significant leitmotifs arose during analysis of the interviews of the students. First, parent involvement in planning for college is critical. All of the students mentioned some involvement by their parents, particularly choosing a college, picking classes, providing financial support, and giving emotional support. Some students indicated that they ended up going to college because their parents and other family members told them they were capable of doing it.

Second, many students emphasized personal responsibility when stating what is necessary for success in college. They reported that they learned that it was up to them to determine their own success. They felt they needed to be patient, focus on their work, use their time wisely, and pay attention. Knowing where to get help, not being ashamed to ask questions, attending classes regularly, staying after class to get help from professors, and being willing to follow college staff's suggestions were particularly helpful.

Third, many students criticized their high school programs for not being challenging enough to prepare them for college. While they may have wanted to receive certain modifications in high school to make passing courses easier, they realized when they got to college that they were not prepared for the challenge. For example, one student noted that only two years of math were required in high school, but she did not feel ready for college level math. She recommended taking four years of math and English in high school. Also, some students reported that they had to begin college by

taking remedial courses which increased the cost of their programs and took time to complete.

Many students said that they had received more help in college than they did in high school. Some admitted that they had not listened to advice in high school or that they did not have any idea of what they wanted for a career so advice seemed irrelevant to them. Some did not understand their disabilities and what they needed help in until they got to college and had to advocate for themselves. The most poignant comments students made were that in high school they were made to feel like 'lost causes' and were not encouraged to even try going to college. They felt that high school teachers and counselors concentrated on the upper 20% of the students, not on them. It was only when they got to college and spoke with faculty members of the Educational Support Service that they felt college was appropriate for them and that they could be successful. One girl whose high school counselor told her she was not college material was later encouraged by the Education Support Service staff who helped her plan her program so that she could transfer to a four-year school to study social work. She said that when a counselor at college told her the high school counselor was wrong about her not being suited for college, it changed her life. Another girl who reported that she was not challenged sufficiently in high school said that she was encouraged more by college staff members. She eventually completed her degree at a four year college and is now an elementary school teacher.

Interviews of education support service staff. Many of the themes found in the student interviews were reiterated, supported, and expanded by the college staff

members. First, all college staff members cited the importance of transition planning for students with all types of disabilities, including mild ones, if they plan to pursue postsecondary education after they finish high school. Planning should begin early, perhaps by sixth grade. College should be an expectation for all students with disabilities, except for those with the most severe disabilities.

Next, college professional staff spoke about what they called the "watered down curriculum" some students received in high school. Along with the lowered expectations of achievement, students are hindered by not having the opportunity to take standardized tests, something required of all entering students. If students do not do well on the entry tests, they may be required to take remedial classes before they can begin coursework in the area of their major field of study. The college counselors recommended that students take as many math and English classes as they can.

Third, just as the students reported the need for personal accountability, college staff discussed responsibility as a major factor in college success. A distinction was made between high school where everything was done for the students and college where there is "no coddling." Students need skills in self-advocacy, studying, making decisions for themselves, and critical thinking. One counselor spoke of students needing a "schema" for college, an understanding of "what college is all about." Many students have "low academic self-esteem" because they have been told they do not belong in college or they are not smart enough. Some entering students lack goals altogether, are confused about their goals and how to accomplish them, or do not know what they want

to study for a career. Some students have to overcome low motivation and the tendency to expect things to be done for them.

Students need to understand their disabilities, know what help they need in order to learn, and know how to access that help on the college campus. While parents are critical to the planning process, students need to become independent and self-sufficient during their first year on campus. One counselor related how he worked with both students and parents as the students began college. His goal was to gradually wean the students off of total dependence on their parents and to help them develop self-reliance.

In conclusion, college staff of the Educational Support Service gave insightful suggestions for transition planning based on their experiences with incoming freshman students. Students need a strong knowledge of their disabilities and what type of help works best for them. The gap between high school expectations and college standards is greater for those with disabilities. Parents and high school staff need to present the positive aspects of college in terms of the pursuit of a lucrative, fulfilling career. Students with disabilities need to know there are many options available. They can complete a certificate program in a year or two, complete an associate degree, or even transfer to a four-year college. College staff members cautioned that planning should not be so skewed toward a four-year college program. Ideally, emphasis on college expectations in the areas of academic requirements and self-responsibility should be intensified as the student gets closer to finishing high school.

Chapter V

Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

This study arose as an effort to evaluate the success that students with disabilities have as they transition from a high school setting to a postsecondary setting, most particularly, the community college. Selected college students and college staff members were questioned regarding how well students are prepared to enter postsecondary education and how public education at the secondary level can assist in this important life transition for students with disabilities. This study has pointed to the need for further investigation as school personnel strive to help students with disabilities reach their highest potential. The following recommendations focus on legislation/policy, what public school and college personnel need to consider, and what parents and students need to know if transition to the adult world is to be successful. Practical suggestions as well as ethical considerations are presented. Lastly, recommendations for further study are offered for scholarly consideration.

Summary of the Study

How the study was done. Over thirty students who accessed the services of the learning disabilities center of a south Texas community college asked to participate in this study. Students, all of whom were 18 years of age or older, gave written permission to allow the researcher to request their high school special education records, particularly the Individual Transition Plans (ITPs) which the school districts are mandated to develop. The ITPs reflect what the school district personnel, the parents, the students and outside

agencies regarded as necessary for these students with disabilities to make a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education. Students also agreed to an interview regarding their participation in the development of their ITPs and their current needs as college students. Some of the student records were not available and some of the consenting students were unable to be located for the scheduling of the interviews. A total of fifteen students were interviewed and their high school special education records including the ITPs were analyzed to determine which components were espoused by the participants as being necessary for success in college.

In addition to student interviews, discussions with college staff members who work in the Educational Support Services center were conducted regarding the preparedness of the entering students to succeed at college-level academic programs. College staff members were given the opportunity to make recommendations to students, parents, and public school staff on how to facilitate the transition of the students to college. They also reported what skills and characteristics the most successful of the students with disabilities displayed.

Current literature was reviewed regarding frequently recommended elements for transition planning for students with disabilities who desire to attend postsecondary education. The twelve most often occurring components documented in the literature were the following: self advocacy/self-determination, knowledge of postsecondary option/community resources, study skills/organization skills/time management; self-understanding/disability awareness; academic competencies; college preparatory classes/inclusion; social skills/self-esteem; interagency collaboration; knowledge of

accommodations needed/available; participation in transition planning by the student; participation in transition planning by the parent/family; and financial assistance. Using these twelve components as a template, the students' ITP plans developed by their high schools were analyzed. Students were asked to recall which of these elements were discussed during the development of their ITPs. Students were then asked which of the elements they felt were necessary for college success, particularly after having begun their college studies. The recommended components were used to question college staff members about how well-prepared their students were to begin a college program. Staff members were also queried about which of the twelve elements they felt were necessary components for planning transition from high school to college.

Theoretical basis. Argyris and Schön (1974) presented a theory that there could be a difference between what people espouse as the basis for their actions (espoused theory) and what they really base their actions (theories-in-use). Argyris and Schön urged policy makers and those who carry out the policy to test espoused theory against theories-in-use which form the basis of our actions. By such testing, the effectiveness of social models can be verified or changed as needed. When models are not tested, self-sealing can occur preventing learning and improvement in consistency and effectiveness of the model. In terms of this study the ITPs developed by school personnel, parents, students and agency representatives form the espoused theory. The ITPs document what the developers believed to be what the student needed in order to complete high school and begin a program in a postsecondary setting. Data gathered from the student and college staff interviews form theories-in-use which describe what the students and

college staff believe to be the actual needs of the students since beginning their college programs. In order to determine if the espoused theories and the theories-in-use were consistent and effective, ITP components were compared with what students and staff report are necessary for smooth transition and with what literature posits as recommended elements for writing ITPs. This study was undertaken to test the consistency with which transition plans truly reflect the needs of the students and how effective the plans are in facilitating the students' movement from high school to postsecondary educational settings.

Major outcomes. There appears to be a significant discrepancy between what ITP developers espouse as needed for students to transition after graduation from high school and what the students themselves as well as college staff purport to be needed in actuality. There is a strong correspondence between what students and staff believe to be needed and what current education literature posits as effective elements for developing ITPs. The discrepancies uncovered in this study can inform the education field of changes and improvements needed in the way ITPs are developed for students with disabilities who wish to further their education at the community college setting.

Key Findings

The key findings of this study were organized into three major categories: answers to research questions proposed at the inception of the study; results from the qualitative portion of the study focusing on the student and college personnel interviews; and analysis of the various findings utilizing the model presented by Argyris and Schön (1974).

Research questions. The following research questions were proposed to investigate the extent and type of transition services needed by students with disabilities who enter postsecondary programs, i.e., community college:

1. What transition services are documented on ITPs and IEPs as needed for students with disabilities who exit high school and enter postsecondary programs?
2. What transition services do community colleges recommend for students with disabilities who enter community colleges?
3. What is the relationship between the espoused transition needs of students with disabilities as outlined in their ITPs and IEPs and the actual needs of these students as expressed by community colleges?

Research question 1. What transition services are documented on ITPs and IEPs as needed for students with disabilities who exit high school and enter postsecondary programs? The students' ITPs were analyzed to determine which of the twelve recommended components were included. It was discovered that three of the twelve elements were not found in any of the ITPs analyzed: study skills/organization skills/time management; self-understanding/disability awareness; and financial assistance. Components found at a frequency level of 13.3% or less were academic skills and accommodations needed . Components occurring at a frequency level of 50% or greater included self-advocacy, postsecondary options, mainstreaming/inclusion, social skills, interagency cooperation, student participation in the ITP process, and parent participation in the process. None of the ITPs included all the recommended

components. Of the elements which were included, most ITPs documented only minimal evidence of the components, with only a few isolated examples of expanded descriptions of the components.

Research question 2. What transition services do community colleges recommend for students with disabilities who exit high school and enter postsecondary programs? Four college personnel from the Educational Support Services center of the community college were asked to comment on the level of preparedness of the incoming students to be successful in college. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "Most incoming freshmen with disabilities have received adequate preparation by their secondary schools in order to be successful in college," all four staff members disagreed with the statement. The staff members noted that the students were particularly unprepared in the areas of need for remediation, lack of student participation in planning for college, and poor attendance in high school. The staff personnel were asked to rate the level of preparation of incoming students in ten of the twelve areas considered to be best practice for developing ITPs. The two components they were not asked to rate were participation in planning meetings by students and also by parents since it would be unlikely that the faculty would know if the students and parents had been present at the high school planning meetings. During the open-ended part of the interview one of the staff members did address the area of student participation by stating, "The high school is required to take care of everything for the students. Students may take a backseat in the whole ITP process…."

The staff members were asked to rank the level of preparation of incoming students in ten of the twelve recommended components of the ITP: self-advocacy, postsecondary options, study skills, disability awareness, academic skills, inclusion, social skills, agency collaboration, accommodations needed, and knowledge of financial assistance. Students were ranked low by at least half of the staff members in the areas of self-advocacy, knowledge of postsecondary options, study skills, agency collaboration, knowledge of accommodations needed, and knowledge regarding financial assistance. At least half of the staff rated the students as adequately prepared in the areas of disability awareness, inclusion, and social skills. One of the educators rated six out of ten items at a minimal level of preparedness. Two educators indicated no level of preparation for study skills, knowledge of financial assistance, knowledge of postsecondary options, and interagency collaboration. Another educator ranked three items as "don't know": academic competencies, college preparatory classes/inclusion, and social skills. He stated that the level of academic competencies "depends on the student." Success in college depends on having a "solid high school program."

In other responses to the open-ended interview questions several areas critical to successful transition to college were reported. A major limiting factor for success in college seems to be poor study skills. Students "need to keep track of everything on their own." Being able to make decisions for themselves is also critical to success. Less successful students were viewed as tending to "believe things will be done for them." Other critical transition skills were "knowledge about one's disability, knowledge of

strengths and weaknesses and knowing what accommodations work for them." These skills fall into the category one educator called "good self-advocacy."

The director of the learning disabilities center rated academic competencies as minimal in entering students with learning disabilities and cited "a watered down curriculum" in high school as part of the problem. She reported that students are not prepared in "self-advocacy, personal accountability and study skills." The students appeared to have "low academic self-esteem because they have been told they are stupid and don't belong in college."

When analyzing the ratings given to student preparedness based on ten of the twelve suggested ITP components and the responses given to the open-ended questions, staff members of the community college learning disabilities center focused on several of the recommended ITP components. These components included study skills, knowledge of financial assistance, knowledge of postsecondary options, academic competencies, interagency collaboration, knowledge of their disabilities, knowledge of what accommodations are needed to compensate for these disabilities, self-advocacy and self-esteem.

Research question 3. What is the relationship between the espoused transition needs of students with disabilities as outlined in their ITPs and IEPs and the actual needs of these students as expressed by community colleges? The espoused transition needs of the subjects of this study were documented in the ITPs completed by high school professional staff, students, parents, and agency representatives who composed the ITP planning committee. The ITPs represent what the high school personnel believed that the

students would need as they transition from high school to postsecondary education, which in this study is the community college. Recommended effective ITP components were isolated from the literature. Students and staff from the community college were queried regarding what the actual transition needs of the students which form theories-in-use as noted by Argyris and Schön (1974).

There appears to be a series of incongruities between the espoused theories (data in the ITPs) and the theories-in-use (what students, college staff, and transition literature recommend). First, an analysis of the documented ITP components reveals that three of the twelve recommended ITP components were not found in any of the ITPs of the students in the study: study skills, disability awareness, and financial assistance. Further, only two of the ITP components (social skills and agency collaboration) appeared on the ITPs at a higher percentage rate than what students reported as being needed for effective transition planning. The remaining ten ITP components either were not present on the students' ITPs or they were documented on the ITPs at a lower percentage rate than the percentage recommended by the students as being necessary for success in college. Similarly, college staff members recommended ten of the twelve components. While the components of inclusion and social skills were not overtly mentioned by the college staff, it can be inferred that these components were important to them because they mentioned the need for students to know what is required in regular education classes in high school and they stressed the needs of work experience and personal accountability which are typically understood as part of successful social skills. Recommendations of college staff members and the students in the study more closely align with each other and with the

recommendations from the literature than either align with the actual documented contents of the students' ITPs. These findings beg the question, "How effective is current transition planning for students with disabilities when the espoused transition needs are not congruent with theories-in-use needs as proposed by transition literature, student recommendations, and college staff recommendations for success in college?"

Qualitative findings. Interviews of the students and the college staff members gave a rich texture to the quantitative analysis of the ITP items. Students reported that most had a rather passive role in the transition meeting and the development of the ITP. When asked what items they recalled as being discussed at the meeting, many claimed the items were not covered although there is evidence on the ITP that they were discussed. This apparent detachment from the planning process calls into question the relative effectiveness of the process and the seemingly unsuccessful promotion of student involvement in the process. The students' frequent inability to recall what was discussed during the planning meeting may be a result of this detachment or the feeling by the students that the topics covered are not relevant to them in a personal and immediate way. The interviews of the students gave evidence that students strongly believed that success in college depended on three important elements. The students stressed personal attributes such as staying focused, asking questions, knowing where to get help, paying attention, using their time wisely, and following suggestions from the college staff. A second major area of help in achieving success in college was receiving the necessary modifications for their course work. They had to know how to access the learning disability center and how to speak with their professors about accommodations for their

disabilities. The third area students stressed was how critical it was to their success that they received support from their families or others important in their lives. Another important finding from the interviews was that most of the students felt they did not receive much assistance to transition to college from their high school staff and coursework. Most felt they received much more assistance from the college staff, particularly staff from the Educational Support Services center.

Interviews with college staff members provided other qualitative findings. Staff reported that success in college seems to be a function of personal attributes, especially self-advocacy and decision making skills. They viewed older students and those who had work experience as being more likely to succeed. They recommended that public schools begin the transition process at an early age (i.e., 6th or 7th grade), that high school programs become more demanding (i.e., no "watered down curriculum), and that students receive more career guidance so they realize what careers are possible and where they can go to college to train for those careers which interest them.

Argyris and Schön. The model of espoused theory versus theories-in-action as presented in Argyris and Schön's (1974) work was chosen as a framework for analyzing the effectiveness of the transition process intended to help students with disabilities move from high school to a community college setting. A major premise in the work by Argyris and Schön is that there can be a fundamental difference between what one espouses as the basis of one's actions and upon what theories one actually bases behavior. Formulating or modifying one's theory-in-use results in learning. The authors termed learning which helps one vary action strategies within a program as "single-loop

learning" while "double-loop-learning" helps one to evaluate a program and make changes as needed (p.19.) "Self-sealing" occurs when one does not test assumptions underlying behavior, and therefore, does not change behavior as needed (p.80). Self-sealing prevents learning from occurring and mitigates improvement in effectiveness and congruency of theories-in-use. For purposes of this study, the transition plans written by educators, parents, students, and agencies for students with disabilities form the espoused theories upon which the transition plan developers attempt to foresee what the students will need as they prepare for adult life. Theories-in-use in this study refer to the actual needs of the students with disabilities as they begin community college as reported by the students themselves and the college staff who served them.

Results of this study reveal that the espoused theories as presented on the ITPs are not congruent with the theories-in-use which students and staff report and which transition literature endorses. The discrepancy between the espoused theory and the theory-in-use can inform practitioners about creating more effective transition plans. The following section proposes recommendations to assist in developing a transition planning process which is more effective and efficient and which engages the students with disabilities to participate in planning for the future.

Recommendations Based on Findings

Current literature documents the difficulties which students with disabilities encounter as they move from the public high school setting to adult life. This study found that the espoused theories used to develop effective transition plans for students with disabilities fall short of the actual needs of the students (theories-in-use). Using the

suggestions of the students and their college educators, recommendations are made in the areas of legislation governing the development of ITPs, professional training/behavior, parental roles, and roles the students must play if the transition process is to be more relevant and effective.

Legislation/Policy Making. An examination of the data compiled from the student and college staff interviews uncovers various suggestions of adherence to or modification of current state and federal legislation regarding the transition planning process.

1. Federal law 34 CFR§300.320(b) requires that transition services begin no later than when the student turns 16, unless an IEP Team determines that it is appropriate to begin at a younger age. Several of the college staff members who counsel in the learning disabilities center noted that they believed it was important to begin talking about college at a much earlier age, preferably "6th, 7th or 8th grade." One college educator reasoned that "beginning at 14, everyone should have a clear idea where they are going." He also stated that waiting until the student's junior or senior year in high school "may be too late." The director of the Educational Support Services center communicated a need for students to begin to learn in 6th grade what academic expectations they need to meet if they intend to go to college. She relayed, "It would help to be told in 6th grade, you have to take TASP, etc…They need to know details of college." While current legislation allows for transition planning to begin before the student turns 16, school district may wish to emphasize an

early start in their district special education guidelines. Wilson, Hoffman, and McLaughlin (2009) studied 10th and 12th graders with disabilities who indicated a desire to attend postsecondary education. While many of the students had and sustained plans to attend college, their course of study in high school did not always align with their desire to attend college. The authors concluded that

> Transition planning would need to begin prior to ninth grade to allow educators, parents, and students to develop a plan that will consider any need for remediation of prerequisite skills and supplemental programming that will allow for the development of a college preparatory course of study through high school. (p. 9)

Other scholars have also recommended planning a course of study early in high school, or perhaps even in middle school grades, in order to provide students with the greatest opportunity to prepare for college (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Kohler, Shaw, Madaus, and Banerjee, 2009; Mazzotti, Rowe, Kelley, Test, Fowler, and Kortering, 2009; and Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy , 2005).

2. Both college educators and students in the study noted the importance of outside agencies which assisted the students with disabilities in transitioning to the community college setting. Most often mentioned was Texas Rehabilitation Commission (TRC). Federal law 34 CFR § 300.320 (b) provides for public schools to invite other agencies to participate. The law stipulated that if agencies do not attend the meetings at the school district, the school should take "other steps to obtain participation of the other agency in

the planning of any transition services." In 2006, IDEA Part B of the federal regulations dropped this stipulation, reasoning that school districts really have no authority to compel other agencies to attend transition planning meetings (Walsh, 2010). Nevertheless, based on students' and college staff's opinions, the school districts should use every means possible to have an ongoing relationship with agencies such as TRC, encouraging the agencies to attend meetings and also provide information to parents so that the parents and their children have a clear idea of the services that can be provided if the student with disabilities wishes to attend college. As one college educator cautioned, "Culturally maybe they don't perceive that college could be for them." Outside agencies can be helpful in instilling the idea to parents that college is a reasonable option for most students with mild disabilities (Angell, Stoner, & Fulk, 2010; and Preparing for postsecondary education, 2004).

3. Current legislation does not require work experience in order for students to graduate from high school. Several members of the college staff reported that students who do well in college are often older and have job experiences. School districts may wish to consider training for counselors and special education educators who are included as IEP and ITP planning committee members to encourage students with disabilities to take vocational courses which allow for guided work experiences. Several of the students in the study reported that they believed their work experiences helped them prepare for college. Examples included working in a day care for a student going into the

field of education and working at a hospital for a young man wanting to study radiology at the community college. One student reported that working in a nursing home, while not directly related to his career goals, helped him decide that he wanted a career involved with helping people,

4. A final policy recommendation drawn from the interviews is that counseling for college should be offered to all students with disabilities, especially those with mild disabilities. One college staff member stated that "high school counselors don't want to deal with the disabled." However, students with disabilities need to know about college which may be an appropriate setting for them. School district policy makers and those planning in-service training should consider college planning as an important area for staff education. As one of the college staff members cautioned, the gap between high school and college is bigger for students with disabilities. Staff training could help meliorate this daunting gap.

Professional training/behavior. The following are suggestions for professional enhancement vis-à-vis Argyris and Schön's model of double-loop learning in which it is possible to modify and change theories-in use.

1. Coursework in high school needs to be more demanding for students with disabilities, notwithstanding the fact that these students function at an academic level below that which could be expected based on their tested intelligence level in one or more academic subject areas. Early determination of disability, early intervention by the school, and the content of IEP goals

should guide discussions about the transition plan, including decisions about academic coursework. One suggestion by a college learning disabilities educator was that even if students with disabilities are taught an academic subject in a special education rather than in a general curriculum classroom, the student should be introduced to the requirements the regular education class upholds. Students receiving instruction in special education resource classrooms should be similar to college preparation programs. For example, a syllabus can be used as it is in many college courses; students would be expected to learn to budget their time and improve their study skills; and critical thinking (not just rote learning) would be stressed. Students should be required to take as much math and English classes as they can. Students should be given the opportunity to take a variety of test types such as essay writing and standardized tests. Students should be informed of college-level expectations, especially during the last two years of high school.

2. One of the college educators suggested that academic testing should be done for high school freshman and repeated each year or two to help determine their remediation needs. For example, the question the testing should help answer is this: If this student were to begin a college program right now, how much remediation (i.e., remedial classes) would be needed? Such academic or standardized testing is generally used in most public schools, but it is mainly used to track student achievement and progress and to plan future courses, not as an indicator of how the student would function in a college setting.

Students in the study remarked on the time and money they had to spend on remedial coursework before they could begin their regular college program. Any assistance in letting the student know what might be expected from them in college would be beneficial.

3. Students with disabilities need to be given comparable counseling for college that their non-handicapped peers receive. College should be a reasonable expectation for all students. As one student in the study exemplified, there should be no "lost causes." Students with disabilities should be given more opportunities to learn about college than just participating in "college night." One possible resource is ex-students who have begun or completed college programs. The students in this study were very insightful and articulate about relating their experiences transitioning from high school to college. High schools could draw on this resource by inviting panels of ex-students to speak with students with disabilities who are considering going to college. Students with disabilities also need career counseling. Several students in the study reported that they had no idea in high school what they wanted to do for a living, much less pick an appropriate college program.
4. Students with disabilities should be given the opportunity to have work experiences during their high school programs. Often work programs in special education are primarily for students with severe disabilities. According to comments from the college educators, work experience is a predictor of college success. Students with work experiences seem to display

more mature behaviors, such as personal responsibility and perseverance, which appear to correlate with good study habits in college.

5. Each high school special education program should consider instituting a mentoring program in which each student has at least one individual (teacher, counselor, etc.) who will provide individual assistance in the transition process. One of the students in the study related that her high school counselor had told her she was not "college material." It was not until she entered college that she received the encouragement she needed to continue. Mentors could help build a student's self-esteem, encourage disability awareness including knowing what modifications work for the student, and develop student's skills in self-advocacy. Mentors could also assist the student in developing a course plan for high school which would prepare the student for college.

Recommendation for parents. Parents should not underestimate the positive impact their support has on their children as they move from high school to community college. Most of the subjects in the study listed their parents or family members as the resource that helped them the most when deciding on a college, enrolling, and beginning their program. Transition literature cites parent participation at the ITP meeting as a critical component to effective planning (PACER Center, 2005; and Shaw, 2009). Every effort should be made to develop cooperative parent/school relationships early in the student's educational program. Even if the parents have not themselves attended college, their influence is considerable. Several students reported that their parents got them in

touch with people they knew who had some experience in attending college and were able to give useable advice to the students. Parents are encouraged to be advocates for their children whom they know and understand better than anyone else. Every college has a center for students with learning disabilities that can serve as a powerful resource for accessing assistance in such areas as academic modifications and financial assistance. Students may need their parents to make the first contact with the learning disabilities center so that services can begin. As one college educator described, the first year is a "weaning off" period when students are given more responsibility to handle their own matters. Nevertheless, parents can be of great help to get the student the help needed to begin the process of self-advocacy and self-reliance (PACER Center, 2010).

Recommendations for students. The following recommendations for students with disabilities who desire to transition from high school to a community college setting arose from comments from the students in the study and comments from the community college educators who worked with them. The recommendations also relate to the recommended ITP components in the literature regarding transition planning.

1. Current transition literature, students in the study, and college educators in the study stressed the need for good self-advocacy skills. Students are, therefore, advised to learn about their disability, learn about what modifications are needed in educational settings to mitigate the limitations imposed by the disabilities, and learn where to go to get assistance. Students are encouraged to form a mentoring relationship with some professional in the high school setting, i.e., a regular or special education teacher, a counselor, an

administrator, etc. To be a good self-advocate, students must attend their ARD and ITP meetings and learn to actively participate in the planning process (Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004; Preparing for postsecondary education, 2010; and West, Corbey, Boyer-Stephens, & Jones, 1999).

2. Students are advised to enlist the help of parents, family and friends to aid in planning for adult life such as what career to explore, where to go to get further training, and how to access financial assistance. Students in the study mentioned getting such assistance from their parents, a fiancée, a cousin, a lady at church, and other relatives who attended college.
3. While in high school, students should be encouraged to take advantage of elective courses, extra-curricular activities, and work experiences. Students in the study listed many things besides traditional classes as being helpful to prepare them for college. These included culinary arts class, sports, debate class, child development and child care classes, working in a day care, keyboarding class, automotive class, reading improvement, health occupations, student council, science club, high school business classes, and marching band. Students in the study claimed the classes and activities helped them to determine what they might like to study in college and to increase their self-reliance and self-responsibility skills.
4. Students are encouraged to seek career counseling and to get some type of work experience while in high school. College staff interviewed mentioned that students who had work experience appeared to be more successful than

those who did not. One student in the study gave as an example that he was currently studying radiology. One summer he volunteered at a hospital stating, "This helped me the most." Another student reported that she took childcare classes and worked at a day care during high school. At the time of her interview she was studying to be a kindergarten or pre-k teacher. Another young man interviewed said that working at a nursing home "helped me and made me want to help people." Career counseling is offered at most high schools and in the Educational Support Services center at the community college in the study. One college staff member related that students are often not aware that they can get into a certification program of one to two years in length and secure a lucrative job. As an example the staff member reported that "You can take a one-year program and then make $60,000 a year…A plumber can make $150 an hour."

5. Students with disabilities who enter college should take advantage of the services of the learning disabilities center. Counseling regarding their type of disability, how to get financial aid, and how to get modifications in order to be successful in class could be provided. One of the college staff listed several critical areas in working with the learning disability center: Do not wait until on the verge of failure to enlist help; follow through on staff's recommendations such as tutoring; and take the advice given about not taking too heavy a course load when beginning a program. One staff member

succinctly expressed the staff's desire to help: "I don't look at disability. I see a student who wants to be successful. How can I help him?"

6. Students are advised to seek community services which help prepare students for college. For example, the college district in which this study was completed has been offering a senior summer program for eleven years for students who have just graduated and who wish to begin a college program. Students in the summer program can familiarize themselves with college by talking a couple of courses while they receive counseling and "insight into how college life works" (Padilla, 2010, p. 9B). A variety of postsecondary institutions have summer programs designed to expose students to typical factors of college life such as living in a dorm, social skills, using a computer, study skills, and instruction in academic areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Ethical considerations. Besides the practical outcomes of the study that can inform policy, legislation, professional training, parents, and the students themselves, an equally important area, professional ethics, should be given consideration. A surprising theme was detected during the student interviews and also hinted at by college staff. Despite inroads made to assist people with disabilities to have equal access to public programs and services, the students expressed apparent discrimination directed towards them, especially while in high school. There are several examples from the study to illustrate this problem. One male in the study who reported that he had a diagnosis of Emotionally Disturbed and Learning Disabled reported several occurrences in high

school that seemed to be distressing to him. When asked if he had attended his ITP meeting at the completion of high school he stated, "I did not attend. I am bi-polar and ADHD. It was a school decision for me not to attend. No one talked to me about college. They thought of me as a lost cause." A review of his special education records revealed that he is functioning within the average range of intelligence. He passed each part of the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) at the exit level. A review of IEPs from the last several years in school show that his behavior had severely exhausted his relationship with the school. The question that needs to be addressed is "At what point do school personnel give up on a student and not hide the impression that he is indeed a lost cause?" It is hoped that the answer to that question is "Never."

The director of the learning disabilities center related her very different experience with students with the diagnosis of emotional disturbance (ED):

> *ED students don't have many transition problems unless they have big secondary learning problems. They thrive in a less structured environment. We don't have a problem with them. We may have to chat with them only once a year. One was an honor roll student. We see that a lot.*

A second example of discrimination because of handicapping condition was relayed by a young woman in her second year of program she was pursuing in order to transfer to a local four year college to become a teacher. She reported:

> *My high school is more concerned with the top 20%. I was in the middle. The second half are on their own…My mom didn't like what the counselor told me—that I would never make it in college. We went to the college learning center and*

my life changed. The person there said the counselor was wrong. I'm a sophomore now and plan to transfer to [a four-year private college] in the fall next year.

Her high school records indicate that she was exempted from taking the standardized exit test. One college educator opined that students should be given opportunities to take all standardized tests as this will help them take tests in college and have a greater chance to succeed. Is her exemption by the high school another example of a student with disabilities being assessed as not being capable of college when, in this case, the student was clearly competent and successful in her college program? Educators need to recognize the potential in students and not limit their dreams unnecessarily. It is fortunate for the young woman that the learning disabilities counselor was able to distinguish her talents and encouraged her to pursue her future goals.

Two recent studies have also documented discrimination as reported by student subjects. Cobb and Alwell (2009) conducted a systematic review of 31 studies involving transition planning or interventions. The authors found an emerging theme "salient across multiple disability groups" which was "lack of respect and understanding by some teachers" (p. 77). Cobb and Alwell recommended educating general education teachers about "the real struggles faced by students with disabilities…" (p. 78). They viewed the use of inclusion in the general curriculum for students with disabilities as a way to foster collaboration between general and special educators as they provide services to students with disabilities.

Getzel and Thoma (2008) interviewed 34 students with disabilities who were engaged in postsecondary education. One student subject reported that "no one understood my disability, and I was told that I would not attend college" (p. 80). According to the researchers, students in the focus groups "believed that learning about themselves, [particularly about one's disability], was critical to their success in college" (p.80). Understanding one's disabilities may shield a student with disabilities from those in influential positions who may not understand the challenges as well as the student does.

The examples presented from this study can be viewed using Gordon W. Allport's (1979) ideas on prejudice. Allport defined prejudice as "thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant" (p. 6) and as "an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group" (p.7). Several students in the study were discouraged by personnel at the high schools they attended from pursuing a college degree or certificate program. They were prejudged as being incapable of doing college level work despite receiving no intervention in the form of assessment for college performance, career counseling, or training in how to adapt to college. One college staff reported that the incoming students lacked a "schema for college—what college is all about…They have no schema for study skills required and what their role in college is." This staff member also commented on what she feels is the "most overriding issue—low academic self-esteem because they have been told they are stupid and don't belong in college. It takes many [college] semesters to overcome." Because of prejudgment or

what Allport terms *prejudice*, some students with disabilities are precipitately impeded from pursuing a college education simply because they are labeled as disabled. Educators have a responsibility to all students and perhaps to heed this college staff member's entreaty: "College is an incredibly appropriate placement for most disabled students. It should be the expectation as though there wasn't a disability." Research supports her belief that college is appropriate for students with disabilities (Shaw, 2009; Technology transfer rehabilitation engineering research center, 2006 ; and Wilson, Hoffman, & McLaughlin, 2009). Allport (1979) stated that "prejudgments become prejudice only if they are not reversible when exposed to new knowledge" (p.9). The success of many of the students in this study may inform educators that such success is not only possible, it should be fostered, not obstructed.

Recommendations for Further Study.

As the study progressed, comments from the student interviews and the interviews of college educators generated several ideas for further study which would continue to inform practitioners about effective practices in transition planning for students with disabilities.

One idea for further study would be to conduct a longitudinal study of the original students interviewed to see their progress over a few years of college study. Partly because the students were difficult to locate and the researcher worked on the study at different intervals, some of the interviews were held long after the original contact. During the intervening time period, some of the students had quit college, joined the military, or transferred to a four-year college. One student had joined the Navy but

reported he had been "removed". He had originally entered the community college to study "aviation structure." After leaving the Navy he was working as a bartender but said he still wanted to study aeronautics. A longitudinal study would provide information on why some students succeeded in college and why some students left to pursue other options.

During the course of the study, it became clear that parents had an enormous impact on their children in terms of assisting them in picking a college, getting enrolled, paying tuition, and providing numerous types of support, both emotional and fiscal. A follow-up study could focus on what parents of students believed to be the extent of their children's preparation for college. The following are areas in which the parents could be questioned regarding their children's transition from high school to community college:

1. How prepared do you feel your child was for college entry?
2. What problems did you student have when beginning a college program?
3. What topics do you recall being discussed during the transition planning meeting you attended at your student's high school?
4. Based on your child's entry into college, what topics do you now believe should have been discussed which were not or which were not discussed in sufficient detail?
5. What resources (i.e., counselors, family members, family friends, teachers, etc.) helped your family the most when planning your child's entry into college?

A third suggested area of further study is an investigation of how well-prepared students without disabilities are in transitioning to college. Many of the students in this study revealed that they did not know what career they wanted to follow. One student described the transition planning process as follows: "They asked questions like would I go to college. Yes. What will I do? I didn't know until I went to college." Likewise, many students in the study expressed the fact that they got more help in career counseling when they got to college. The current study of transition services for student with disabilities had no control group of non-handicapped students moving from high school to community college. A future study in this area could focus on some of the following questions to be asked of non-handicapped students:

1. In what areas did your high school experience help prepare you for college entry? In what areas did you feel unprepared?
2. What courses, school personnel, counseling sessions, special events such as college night programs helped you prepare for college?
3. Who helped you the most in the process of entering college, i.e., parents, family members, friends, etc.?
4. Now that you have begun a college program, what do you wish you had known about or done differently in high school to get ready for college?
5. What makes the difference for you to be successful in college? What resources in college have you accessed that have helped you the most?
6. Since entering college, have your career goals changed since you were in high school? What helped you change your mind about a career choice?

7. Now that you have experience in going to college, what advice could you give to high school students planning on entering college?

Answers to these types of questions could be compared to the data provided in the interviews of the subjects in the current study who are learning disabled.

Suggestions to Improve the Study

Total Quality Management (Gitlow & Gitlow, 1994, and Stark, 1998) emphasizes constant improvement of whatever process or product with which one works. There are several needed improvements in the study design which can be detected now that the study is complete. Various limitations of the study were noted in Chapter III. Using the limitations reported, suggestions for improvements for the study can be made.

1. Several of the limitations related the idea that the study was not greatly generalizable because the study focused on only one aspect of the transition process—transition service needs of students with disabilities who enter a community college setting. Subjects in the study were limited to students with disabilities in a limited area of south central Texas. There was also a small sample size, although for qualitative studies, the size was appropriate. One improvement of the study would be to canvass students from several community colleges in several areas of the state. Students in the study attended thirteen different high schools in eight school districts. It is unknown what transition services were available in the districts such as assessment, mentoring, or cooperative arrangements with local colleges. A larger number

of subjects from a wider field of reference would enhance external validity and generalizability.

2. No faculty members of the community college were interviewed. The college staff members who were interviewed were counselors in the learning disability center, not actual teachers of the students in the study. An improvement of the study would be to interview a few of the college faculty who taught a sampling of the subjects and ask them how well-prepared they thought the subjects were as they began their college program. Their comments regarding preparation for college and ease of transition from high school could then be compared to those of the learning disability center staff members. The faculty members' comments could be quite interesting and informative, especially if they had not received much training on the needs of students with disabilities. These teachers could provide a fresh perspective on what incoming students with disabilities need to pass their classes and generally succeed in college.
3. Another limitation was that the current success of the students in the study was not evaluated. For example, a student who may have had an ITP which did not cover the recommended items for successful transition planning may actually be passing courses and doing well. Likewise, an adequate ITP may be present for a student who is nevertheless failing his coursework. An improvement in the study would be to include grade point averages (GPAs)

and compare them to the level of ITP planning to see if there is a correlation between adequate ITP development and higher GPAs.

4. Another noted limitation is that respondents were selected from a group that had volunteered to be in the study. The students selected had come to the learning disability center to acquire their accommodations for their classes. The differences between the students in the study and other students with disabilities who did not come to the learning center are not known from this study. Did the students who did not access the services of the learning disabilities center do so because they did not need the services or because they did not know the services were available? One reason that the students were chosen from the learning disability center is that the students had self-declared as having a learning disability. The students' confidentially was therefore not broken. It would, however, have been interesting to get a wider range of subjects, some of whom who did not use the learning disability center.
5. A final limitation noted subjects were chosen without regard to how long they had exited high school. It has been noted that it appeared that the longer the student had graduated from high school, the less likely it was to obtain adequate records from his/her high school. Older students may have developed more insights into what their needs were to be successful. An improvement in the study might therefore be to screen respondents to limit the study to those who had graduated from high school within the last two years and were in the first year of their college program.

6. An additional improvement is suggested after scheduling the student interviews. All of the subjects signed consent to be in the study at the time they accessed the learning disabilities center services. Appointments for interviews were then scheduled at that time or the students were called to set appointment times to complete the interview. The result was that several of the students had given out-of-date phone information and could not be reached. Letters to the addresses they provided were also not productive as none of the "missing" students called or wrote back to the researcher.
   It might have been more productive to immediately interview the students at the time they granted consent for the study. This method, however, might have further reduced the total number of participants because of time restraints the researcher had in working at the learning disability center. Students were only given several days to request their accommodations and the researcher was present at that time to meet the students. Interviewing each student immediately might have limited access to a greater number of students. However, it is also possible that this method may have increased the number of completed interviews.

Conclusion

Current literature has outlined the difficulty students with disabilities have in navigating the terrain between exiting high school and beginning adult life. The purpose of transition planning is to foster a successful movement to adulthood for the student with disabilities. The aim of this study has been to evaluate how well students with

disabilities who wish to enroll in a community college program have been prepared by those members of their transition plan development team. While most of the ITPs analyzed in this study appeared to contain some of the ITP components recommended in transition literature, students and college staff interviews identified discrepancies between "espoused" and "in action" areas of need if students are to be successful in college. Reducing these discrepancies would help students, parents, and postsecondary schools. The aspirations of policy for transition planning, i.e., required transition plans, and the realities of practice could move to a higher correlation.

Appendix A

Essential Characteristics of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative inquiry is characterized by various connected themes. Patton (1990) outlined ten of these characteristic themes: naturalistic inquiry, inductive analysis, holistic perspective, qualitative data, personal contact and insight, dynamic systems, unique case orientation, context sensitivity, empathic neutrality, and design flexibility. Each of these attributes of qualitative research is discussed below.

Naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry refers to the position in which "the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the research setting" (Patton, 1990, p. 39). Rather than manipulating some aspect of the phenomenon to be studied, the researcher employs qualitative methods in order to "understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states" (p. 41). Patton (1990) contrasted the "fixed treatment/outcome emphasis of the controlled experiment" with what he termed the " dynamic, process orientation" which characterizes naturalistic inquiry (p. 42). Patton (1990) posited:

> A dynamic evaluation is not tied to a single treatment and predetermined goals or outcomes but focuses on the actual operations and impacts of a process, program, or intervention over a period of time. The evaluator sets out to understand and document the day-to-day reality of the setting or settings under study, making no attempt to manipulate, control, or eliminate situational variables or program developments, but accepting the complexity of a changing program reality. The data of the evaluation include whatever emerges as important to understanding the setting. (p. 42)

Inductive analysis. Because qualitative research can be described as being oriented toward discovery, it is based on a model of inductive analysis which "begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns" (Patton, 1990, p. 44). The inductive approach is contrasted with the deductive method in which variables and hypotheses are stated before beginning data collection. Patton (1990) explained:

> The strategy of inductive designs is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be. . . . Theories about what is happening in a setting are grounded in direct program experience rather than imposed on the setting a priori through hypotheses or deductive constructs. (p. 44)

Holistic perspective. Qualitative research methods emphasize understanding the phenomenon under study as a whole. Patton (1990) posited that this holistic perspective contrasts sharply with "the logic and procedures of much evaluation conducted in a quantitative-experimental tradition" (p. 49). In quantitative-experimental studies, key components under study are represented as separate, quantifiable variables. Relationships between these variables are represented statistically. Patton (1990) contended:

> The primary critique of this logic by qualitative-naturalistic evaluators is that such an approach (1) oversimplifies the complexities of real-world experiences, (2) misses major factors of importance that are not easily quantified, and (3) fails to portray a sense of the program and its impact as a "whole." (pp. 49-50)

Qualitative data. Patton (1990) described typical qualitative data as being characterized by the following: "detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; direct quotations capturing people's personal perspectives and experiences" (p. 40).

Personal contact and insight. Qualitative research is marked by researchers who go into the field to have "direct and personal contact with people under study in their own environments" (Patton, 1990, p. 46). In contrast with researchers operating under the quantitative-experimental model who attempt to remain detached from their research subjects, qualitative researchers attempt to actively participate in the lives of their subjects in order to understand their lived reality.

Dynamic systems. In qualitative research, programs are viewed as dynamic, developing and changing. According to Patton (1990), "rather than trying to control, limit, or direct change, naturalistic inquiry expects change, anticipates the likelihood of the unanticipated, and is prepared to go with the flow of change" (p. 53).

Unique case orientation. Qualitative studies are marked by a small number of case studies, "selected for study because they are of particular interest given the study's purpose" (Patton, 1990, p. 53). Patton (1990) contended that qualitative research is predicated upon the assumption that "a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question" (p. 54).

Context sensitivity. Qualitative research is marked by the tendency to place findings in "a social, historical, and temporal context" while being "dubious of the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space" (Patton, 1990, p. 40).

Empathic neutrality. Patton (1990) described empathic neutrality as the ability of the qualitative researcher to include "personal experience and empathic insight as part of the relevant data, while taking a neutral nonjudgmental stance toward whatever

content may emerge" (p. 41). While the researcher regards the people encountered in the study with empathy, the researcher regards study findings with neutrality.

Design flexibility. Qualitative research designs are not completely specified ahead of time. The study design emerges as fieldwork occurs. Patton (1990) explained that the researcher is free to pursue "new paths of discovery as they emerge" (p. 41).

Like Patton, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described various attributes of qualitative or naturalistic research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited fourteen characteristics, many of which overlap with those noted by Patton. These fourteen characteristics are:

1. Natural setting. Research is conducted in the natural context, not isolated from where the entity to be studied exists.
2. Human instrument. The researcher is the primary data-collecting instrument.
3. Utilization of tacit knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is viewed as a legitimate way of knowing.
4. Qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are used, although not exclusively, because they are thought to be more adaptable in dealing with the realities studied.
5. Purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is preferred over random sampling in order to uncover the full range of data.
6. Inductive data analysis. Inductive analysis is thought more likely to describe the setting and identify the "multiple realities to be found in those data" (p. 40).
7. Grounded theory. The researcher believes that guiding theory should emerge from the data "because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered" (p. 41).
8. Emergent design. The design for the study emerges as research enfolds and is not strictly determined ahead of time.
9. Negotiated outcomes. The researcher negotiates meanings with the "human sources from which the data have chiefly been drawn because it is their constructions of reality that the inquirer seeks to reconstruct" (p. 41).
10. Case study reporting mode. The case study reporting mode is preferred over the scientific or technical report because the researcher believes it to be more adaptable to describing the multiple realities encountered.
11. Idiographic interpretation. The researcher pays close attention to the local particulars of the case under study.
12. Tentative application. In contrast to the sureness of findings expressed in positivism, the researcher is more tentative in applying findings to other settings.

13. Focus-determined boundaries. The emerging realities, not the preconceptions of the researcher, determine the focus and boundaries of the study.
14. Special criteria for trustworthiness. The researcher is likely to find "the conventional trustworthiness criteria (internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity) inconsistent with the axioms and procedures of naturalistic inquiry" (p. 42).

Lastly, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) posited a generic definition of qualitative research:

> Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (p. 2)

Characteristics of Quantitative Research

Quantitative research relies on the scientific method, "a general set of procedures through which a systematic approach is implemented" (Wiersma, 1980, p. 5). McMillan and Schumacher (1984) outlined the typical steps in the scientific method:

1. Recognize and define a research problem.
2. Review existing knowledge on the problem.
3. State a research question or hypothesis.
4. Determine the design to investigate the question or test the hypothesis.
5. Collect data.
6. Analyze data.
7. Interpret the results in order to draw conclusions about the research problem. (p. 7)

Bailey (1982) posited that each of these steps is dependent on the previous ones. Research can thus be viewed as "a system of interdependent related stages" (p. 9).

Kerlinger (1986) offered a definition of scientific research: "Scientific research is systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypothesis about the presumed relations among such phenomena" (p. 10). Kerlinger (1986) contended that "the basic aim of science is theory" (p. 8). Theories are used to explain natural phenomena. Other aims of science are "explanation, understanding, prediction, and control" (p. 9).

Pure scientific method or positivism is marked by several characteristics or factors that define it. Porter (1988) described various elements of experimental research. First, the researcher takes a general question and translates it into "a statement of belief about specific alternative practices," or a hypothesis (p. 392). The hypothesis is comprised of an independent variable and a dependent variable. The independent variable is thought "to predict or bring about other differences," which are represented by the dependent variable (p. 393). The hypothesis must be testable, either true or false for a given population.

Porter (1988) contended that experimental designs have three goals. First, the experiment should have internal validity. According to Porter (1988), a study has internal validity if "the independent variable is the only reasonable explanation for differences in the dependent variable" (p. 397). Porter explained that the second goal "is to conduct a study in which even small differences caused by the independent variable are measured with sufficient precision that they will not be overlooked, even though they are embedded in relatively large individual differences among subjects. This goal is called precision" (p. 398). The third goal of a design is "that valid generalizations can be

made from the study" (p. 398). This third goal means that the study has external validity or that "the findings of a particular study had validity beyond or external to that study" (p. 405).

Wiersma (1980) explained methods that can be used in scientific research to increase internal and external validity—random selection and random assignment. "In random selection, the individuals are randomly selected as representing a population, while with random assignment, commonly used in experiments, the individuals are randomly assigned to different groups or treatments" (p. 188). These methods are used to "obtain representativeness and eliminate possible bias" (p. 188).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) delineated five axioms regarding the positivist paradigm. In the first axiom, the nature of reality (ontology) according to positivism is that "there is a single tangible reality 'out there' fragmentable into independent variables and process, any of which can be studied independently of the others" (p. 37). The reality can be both predicted and controlled. The second axiom covers "the relationship of knower to known (epistemology)" (p. 37). In the positivist paradigm, the researcher and the subject are independent and "constitute a discrete dualism" (p. 37). The third axiom contends that the aim of research is to produce knowledge that is generalizable and true across different times and contexts. The fourth axiom posits the "possibility of causal linkages" in which "every action can be explained as the result (effect) of a real cause that precedes the effect temporally (or is at least simultaneous with it)" (p. 38). Lastly, the fifth axiom concerns "the role of values in inquiry (axiology)" (p. 38). The positivist view is that 'inquiry is value-free and can be guaranteed to be so by virtue of

the objective methodology employed" (p. 38). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that these five axioms emphasize the most salient characteristics of positivism.

Justification of Methodological Mix

Having described the salient characteristics of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, it may appear that the methods are mutually exclusive. Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented "challenges to and critiques of positivism" (p. 24), implying that the naturalist paradigm is in many ways superior to the positivist paradigm. The current study attempted to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in an effort to derive the most from the benefits of each methodology. Shulman (1988) held that "selecting the method most appropriate for a particular disciplined inquiry is one of the most important and difficult responsibilities of a researcher. The choice requires an act of judgment, grounded in both knowledge of methodology and the substantive area of the investigation" (p. 13). Shulman recommended focusing on the problem to be investigated before rushing into a choice of methodology. He also cautioned that the researcher must first understand the problem to be studied, decide on the questions to be asked in the study, and "then select the mode of disciplined inquiry most appropriate to those questions" (p. 15). He posited that researchers should avoid becoming "slavishly committed to some particular method" (p. 15).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) noted that novices in the postpositivism paradigm are trained "in ways paralleling the positivist node, but with the addition of qualitative methods" (p. 115). The purpose of this dual training is to mitigate various problems with quantification they noted such as the following: "context stripping"; "exclusion of

meaning and purpose"; "disjunction of grand theories with local contexts"; "inapplicability of general data to individual cases"; and "exclusion of the discovery dimension in inquiry" (p. 106). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), proponents of positivism and postpositivism could accommodate their different views within a single conceptual framework, although the authors noted that this position of accommodation assumes a commensurability "about which there continues to be a great deal of disagreement" (p. 115).

Patton (1990) recommended triangulation, or the combination of methodologies, as a means of strengthening a study design. He explained that "this can mean using several kinds of methods of data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p. 187). Patton (1990) cited Guba and Lincoln as arguing that "the internal consistency and logic of each approach, or paradigm, mitigates against methodological mixing of different inquiry modes and data-collection strategies" (p. 193). Although this caution should not be taken lightly, Patton (1990) contended that

> The practical mandate in evaluation . . .to gather the most relevant possible information for evaluation users outweighs concerns about methodological purity based on epistemological and philosophical arguments. The intellectual mandate to be open to what the world has to offer surely includes methodological openness. In practice it is altogether possible, as we have seen, to combine approaches, and to do so creatively. . . (pp. 193-194)

Patton (1990) posited that "the extent to which a qualitative approach is inductive or deductive varies along a continuum" (p. 194). The researcher may begin a study with an open, inductive stance discovering whatever emerges from the data. The researcher may then move to a more deductive approach when attempting to verify what appears to be emerging. Patton (1990) posited that "this spirit of adaptability and creativity in

designing evaluations is aimed at being responsive to real-world conditions and meeting stakeholder information needs" (pp. 194-195).

Appendix B

Student Permission Form

Dear St. Philips Student:

Congratulations! You represent a success story by enrolling in a community college. Many students who went through high school programs have not gone to college. In cooperation with St. Philip's College and The University of Texas at Austin, I would like to study which of your high school programs and services helped you the most to go on to college.

I am a Director of Special Education in public schools and am very concerned with finding services that will help students get into college. I am also a doctoral student at The University of Texas in Austin. This study will be part of my dissertation for the doctorate degree.

I am requesting your permission to examine your individual transition plans, individual education plans, and other high school records from the high school from which you graduated. I would also like permission to review your college records to see if what your high school planned helped you get into college, choose a program of study, and be successful in college. Following my review of your records I may contact you to ask you to explain further what helped or did not help you in your successful entry into college. All information will be treated as confidential and will not be shared using your name.

It is my hope that this study will help other students like you to get the services they need while in high school so that they can go on to college just as you have done. If you would like to help me with this study, please fill out the bottom of this form and return it to the Norris Technical Building, room 106, where you received your letter of accommodations. Thank you so much for your help.

Sincerely,

Roberta R. Dorow

==========

Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____
Address:_____
Phone number:_____
High school from which you graduated:_____
School district:_____
Social Security Number: _____

I give Roberta R. Dorow permission to obtain the following special education record: Individual Transition Plans, Individual Education Plans, and graduation ARD. I also grant her permission to examine/obtain my records from St. Philip's College. I understand that this information will be treated by Roberta R. Dorow as confidential and reported only as group or anonymous data.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

Appendix C

Cover Letter to Special Education Directors

Dear Director of Special Education:

I am a doctoral student at The University of Texas in Austin where I am conducting a dissertation study on transition planning for students with mild disabilities who wish to enter a community college setting. Enclosed is a release form signed by one of the subjects of my study. The student named has granted permission for me to obtain copies of some of his/her special education records completed while enrolled in your school district. Please send me a copy of the student's Individual Transition Plans (ITPs), the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in which goals based on those ITPs are written, and the student's graduation ARD/IEP.

Please feel free to contact me at Boerne ISD (830-249-9784) where I am currently employed as Director of Special Education. The chairperson of my dissertation committee is Dr. James Yates. He can be reached at The University of Texas at 512-471-7551.

I would greatly appreciate your expediting these records to me. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Sincerely,

Roberta R. Dorow
203 Forrest Trail
Universal City, Texas 78148

Appendix D

Template for ITP Components

Student Name:_____ Date of ITP:_____

High School:_____

For components listed below: not present = 0; present = 1.

____ 1. Self-advocacy/self-determination

____ 2. Knowledge of postsecondary options/community resources

____ 3. Study skills/organization skills/time management

____ 4. Self-understanding/disability awareness

____ 5. Academic competencies

____ 6. College preparatory classes/mainstreaming

____ 7. Social skills/self-esteem

____ 8. Interagency collaboration/linkage

____ 9. Knowledge of accommodations needed/available

____ 10. Participation in transition planning by student

____ 11. Participation in transition planning by parent/family

____ 12. Financial assistance

Appendix E

Template for College Records

Student Name:_____

1. Declared major:
2. Program:
3. Graduate: [ ] yes [ ] no
4. GED: [ ] yes [ ] no
5. Was the student enrolled in high school courses in the chosen field of study? If so, which ones?
6. College entrance exams:
7. Qualified for financial assistance:
8. How many semesters attending the college?
9. On scholastic probation?
10. When did the student enroll in the Educational Support Services Program?
11. What accommodations have been requested?

Appendix F

Student Interview

Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

High School:_____ Date of Graduation:_____

Date of entry into community college:_____

1. Have you ever been enrolled in a community college, university, or other postsecondary institution before? If yes, where and when?

2. By law, high schools are to hold transition planning meetings to discuss what students want to do when they finish high school. Have you ever attended an Individual Transition Plan meeting at the high school(s) you attended?

3. Describe your participation in that planning session(s).

4. Who were the other members at the planning session?

5. Was postsecondary education included in the plan?

6. Where any of the following elements included in your transition plan?

Yes	No	Self-advocacy/self-determination
Yes	No	Knowledge of postsecondary options/community resources
Yes	No	Study skills/organizational skills/time management
Yes	No	Self/understanding/disability awareness
Yes	No	Academic competencies
Yes	No	Mainstreaming/college preparatory classes
Yes	No	Social skills training
Yes	No	Interagency collaboration/linkages
Yes	No	Knowledge of accommodations needed

7. What other needs were discussed at your transition plan meeting?

8. Now that you have enrolled in and attended a community college, what needs do you feel you must have in order to be successful?

9. Which of the following do you now believe that you should have gotten in high school in order to be successful in college?

Need	Don't need	Self-advocacy/self-determination
Need	Don't need	Knowledge of postsecondary options/community resources
Need	Don't need	Study skills/organizational skills/time management
Need	Don't need	Self-understanding/disability awareness
Need	Don't need	Academic competencies
Need	Don't need	Mainstream/college preparatory classes
Need	Don't need	Social skills training
Need	Don't need	Interagency collaboration/linkages
Need	Don't need	Knowledge of accommodations needed/available
Need	Don't need	Participation in transition planning

10. What programs, courses, people, or events helped you the most in your preparation for college?

11. Is there anything else I have not asked that you would like to tell me about your move from high school to the community college?

Appendix G

Permission to Conduct and Tape Interview

I hereby grant Roberta R. Dorow permission to conduct and audiotape this interview for the purpose of completing her dissertation study at The University of Texas at Austin. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that information gathered in this study will remain confidential and will be reported anonymously. I understand that if I have questions I can contact the following:

Roberta Dorow: 210-658-8165

Dr. James Yates, The University of Texas at Austin: 512-471-7551

Signed:_____ Date:_____

Address:_____ Phone:_____

_____

Appendix H

Interview of College Administrator

1. Describe the transition needs of incoming freshman with disabilities. In other words, what skills do these students need to be successful in college?

2. What past training and experiences have you noticed in most successful students with disabilities?

3. What factors seem to influence lack of success in the postsecondary educational setting?

4. Most incoming freshman with disabilities have received adequate preparation by their secondary schools. Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, not sure.

5. Describe student preparation in the following areas:
   Adequately prepared:

Yes	No	DK	Self-advocacy/self-determination
Yes	No	DK	Knowledge of postsecondary options/community Resources
Yes	No	DK	Study skills/organizational skills/time management
Yes	No	DK	Self-understanding/disability awareness
Yes	No	DK	Academic competencies
Yes	No	DK	Mainstreaming/college preparatory classes
Yes	No	DK	Social skills training
Yes	No	DK	Interagency collaboration/linkages
Yes	No	DK	Knowledge of accommodations needed/available

6. Are there any other areas in which students should be given preparation for college while they are in high school?

7. Should students with mild disabilities be given transition services in high school to prepare them for college or should those services be given only to students with more severe disabilities?

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